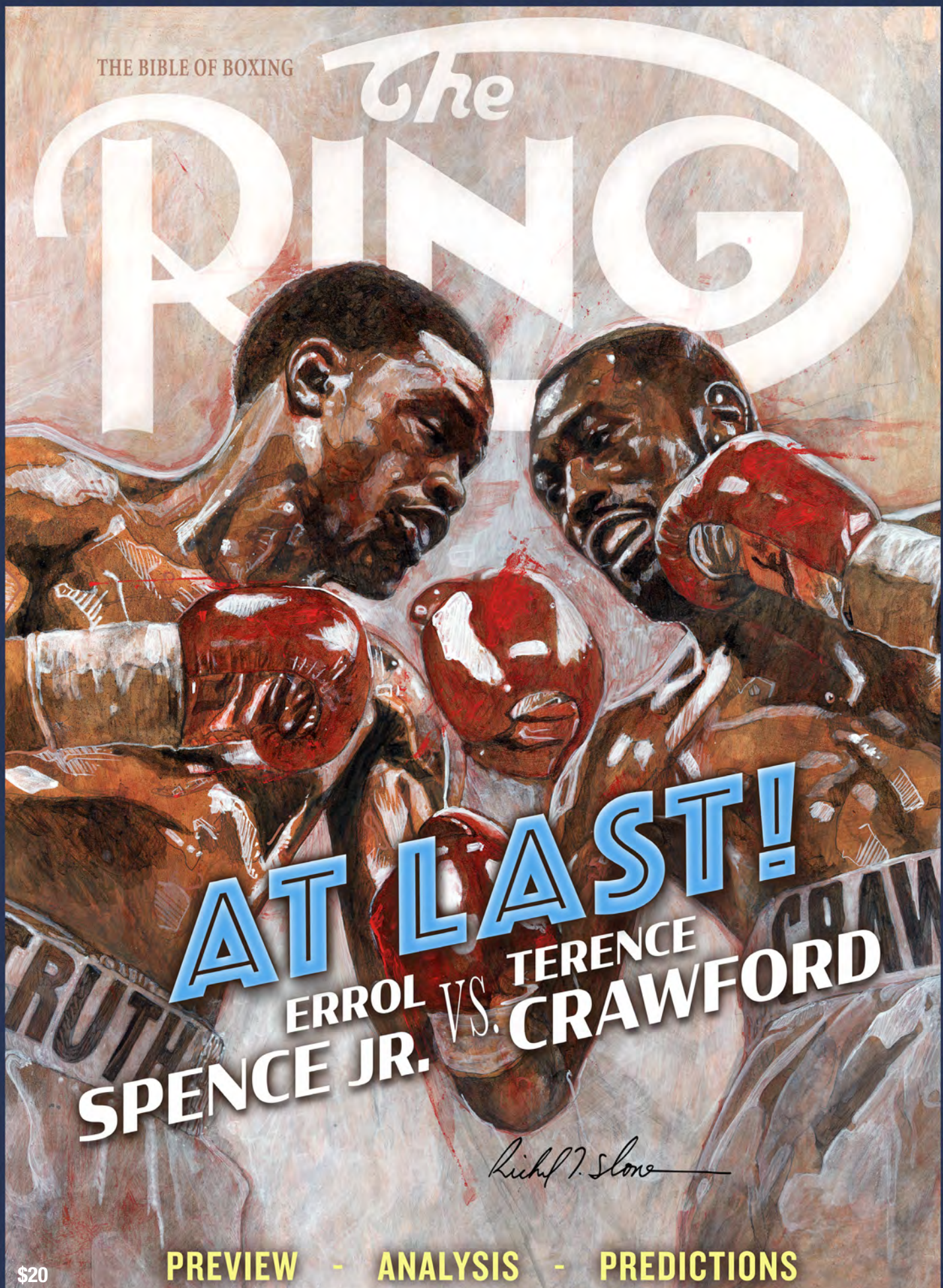
SPECIAL ISSUE: UNDISPUTED WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP



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RYAN HAFEY

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**Spence and Crawford with promoter Tom Brown (center) and trainers Derrick James and Brian McIntyre.**

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD T SLONE

EST. 1922 The RING 100 YEARS

JUNE-JULY 2023

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## RINGSIDE

**BY DOUG FISCHER**

# FINALLY!

**Crawford and Spence were all about the sport, not the business, during their press tour.**

**I was one of those jaded fans** who said I wouldn't care if and when Errol Spence Jr.-Terence Crawford was made, because the showdown between the two best welterweights should have taken place before the pandemic.

But now it's here and I'd be lying if I told you that I wasn't pleased and looking forward to witnessing how the fight plays out on July 29. For years, the industry's inability to deliver Spence-Crawford was a prime example of everything that is wrong with the business of boxing.

However, when I attended the kick-off press conference for the Showtime PPV event in Beverly Hills, California, on June 13, Spence and Crawford reminded me of the SPORT of boxing. Neither fighter brought a large, obnoxious entourage with them. There was no drama between the teams, no cursing or insults between the fighters, no pushing or shoving on the stage. The welterweight titleholders exuded calm confidence, promised victory and an "old-school" fight.

Both spoke of the Golden Age of welterweights that made Sugar Ray Leonard the face of boxing in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Muhammad Ali introduced me to boxing, but Leonard made me a fan of the sport. Witnessing his meteoric rise out of the 1976 Olympics taught me that there were weight classes below heavyweight and the best boxers fought at welterweight. Leonard's battles with Wilfred Benitez, Roberto Duran and Thomas Hearns fascinated me. Later it was the careers of Donald Curry, Marlon Starling, Mark Breland (fresh out of the 1984 Olympics and on the cover The Ring before his pro debut), Milton McCrory, Simon Brown, Buddy McGirt and Pernell Whitaker that I followed as they left their marks in the 147-pound division during the '80s and early 1990s.

By the time I became a member of the boxing media, Felix Trinidad, Ike Quartey and Oscar De La Hoya had taken their places under the welterweight spotlight. Those were good times!

This month reminds me of those bygone eras. On July 8, The Ring's No. 4-rated welterweight, Vergil Ortiz, will face our No. 5 contender, Eimantas Stanionis, in a battle of unbeaten boxer-punchers. On the same day, our No. 3 contender, Jaron Ennis, faces No. 10-rated Roiman Villa in a classic boxer-vs.-pressure fighter matchup. These two quality welterweight bouts will serve as tasty appetizers for the undisputed championship on July 29.

Spence-Crawford is a special fight, and a special fight deserves a special issue of The Ring, which is why we had this one printed for our subscribers and anyone who wants to buy the collector's edition from the online Ring Shop via RingTV.com. (You're welcome!)

And since this month of welterweight action has me feeling all nostalgic, we've brought back two Hall of Famers to help us analyze and cover the Spence-Crawford matchup – former editor-in-chief Nigel Collins and frequent contributor Ron Borges.

We are also welcoming back another former Ring Magazine editor-in-chief, Randy Gordon, who will pen an ongoing column for The Ring beginning with this issue.

To all the readers under 40, pay attention to these guys! They covered the Golden Age of the welterweights mentioned earlier in this column. So, without further ado, heeeeeeeere's Randy!

RYAN HAFEY

ELSA

## COMMISSIONER'S CORNER

**BY RANDY GORDON**

**Gordon and former heavyweight contender Gerry Cooney have co-hosted a show on SiriusXM since 2009.**

**To say I'm thrilled to be** back with The Ring is an understatement. A half-decade stint during the mid-to-late 1970s – at World Boxing, International Boxing and Big Book of Boxing magazines – to the crusty old New York City offices of The Ring, which smelled like cigar smoke, was like a short ride from Mission Control to the launch pad that was "The Bible of Boxing."

My life changed when I walked into the old building on 31st Street, just one block from Madison Square Garden. My life changed into everything I had dreamed of as a kid. Don't ever say "Dreams can't come true" in front of me. I know they can. I know mine did!

I met Nat Fleischer in 1969. I was in college. He bought me lunch. I told him I wanted to be a boxing writer. He told me being a boxing writer is a truly rewarding career. I guess "rewarding" didn't mean monetary richness!

But, in every other way, he was correct.

Less than three years after our initial meeting, Mr. Fleischer passed away from pneumonia. He was 84.

Ten years after our initial meeting, I sat in that very chair, at that very desk and in that very office, hired by the new owner and publisher of The Ring, Bert Randolph Sugar, to be his associate editor, eventually becoming editor-in-chief of this wonderful publication.

While at The Ring, I spent two years as the color analyst alongside Sal Marchiano on ESPN's Top Rank Boxing series. I left The Ring in 1984, when I furthered my broadcasting career, signing with the USA Network, alongside Al Albert. Simultaneously, I was employed

**Commissioner Gordon was thoroughly impressed by Seniesa Estrada's victory over Tina Rupprecht.**

by the MSG Network, working alongside two phenomenal blow-by-blow men – Sam Rosen and Bruce Beck.

My commentating career was getting bigger by the second. But, just as quickly, it stopped.

I was contacted in 1988 by New York's governor, Mario M. Cuomo, who asked me to become the Chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission. It took all of the above-mentioned men – along with my mentors, MSG President Bob Gutkowski and future Hall-of-Fame manager/trainer/announcer Gil Clancy – to talk me into giving up the microphone and becoming the boxing commissioner of the biggest athletic commission in the world.

A gubernatorial change in 1994 sent me packing the final year, and it was back into radio and TV I went.

In 1997, I was hired by SiriusXM Radio to host an MMA Show – Fight Club. The show gave birth to my email: Fightclubrandy@gmail.com, which continues to be my email. Try it. I'll respond. Especially if it's about boxing!

In 2009, I began hosting a boxing show on SiriusXM – At the Fights. My co-host is former heavyweight contender "Gentleman" Gerry Cooney. We are on the air every Monday and Friday from noon until 2:00 p.m. (ET) on SiriusXM channel 156.

Now, after speaking with Doug Fischer, and allowable by my SiriusXM contract, I will once again be a member of the staff at The Ring for the first time since 1984. My youngest daughter was born the week before I left in October of that year. She is now 38, married and has two children, 10 and 6.

Where has the time gone?

**When I was last a Ring staffer,** there was no internet. We had no cell phones. We wrote our stories on typewriters.

Larry Holmes was Heavyweight Champion.

Sanctioning bodies? There were only the WBC, WBA and IBF (which was one year old).

Mike Tyson was still five months away from making his pro debut.

Floyd Mayweather Jr. was 7 years old.

Gervonta Davis wouldn't be born for 10 more years.

Xander Zayas (one of my favorite fighters) wouldn't be born for another 18 years.

Female boxing was basically non-existent, outlawed in most states, including New York. (It was finally allowed and licensed under my administration in 1995.)

The term "pound-for-pound" was rarely used.

Today, that term is a regular part of boxing jargon: "He's an all-time pound-for-pound great" or "He's among boxing's best pound-for-pound fighters."

There are writings that can be found, as early as 1906, that refer to former lightweight champion Battling Nelson as being so good that if all things were equal, he'd be the best fighter in the world.

Nat Fleischer made reference in a 1951 issue of The Ring about Sugar Ray Robinson being pound-for-pound the best fighter in the world.

When I met Mr. Fleischer, we talked about his all-time heavyweight ratings.

He referred to John L. Sullivan being the best heavyweight ever (remember, this was in 1969 – 54 years ago).

He also made reference to Benny Leonard as being a top-10 pound-for-pound fighter.

As I have come to learn, pound-for-pound is strictly a subjective term, much like judging. In judging, three officials watch the same fight from different angles. Sometimes, all three score a round the same. Other times, two of them score it the same.

With pound-for-pound, it's many things. It's a fighter's record … their style … their speed … their power … their domination over the opposition … their grace … their fluidity … their footwork … their mastery of every punch in the boxing handbook, and even not in the boxing handbook … their stamina … their chin … and their defense. It's "Eye Candy" – how they look during the course of the competition.

It's also not just about emerging victorious, but how easy they made their victory look.

Over the last 10 years, several men have been atop the pound-for-pound list.

Up until 2015, the No. 1 male was accepted to be Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Since Mayweather retired in 2015 (and again in 2017 after his bout against Conor McGregor), the No. 1 P4P spot has fluctuated between several guys: Roman Gonzalez, Gennadiy Golovkin, Canelo Alvarez, Vasiliy Lomachenko, Terence Crawford and, most recently, Naoya Inoue and Oleksandr Usyk. A good case can be made for all of them.

Amongst the ladies, and since she turned pro on the heels of winning her second Olympic gold medal, Claressa Shields has been alone at the top of my personal pound-for-pound rankings.

She has won titles at 154, 160 and 168 pounds. She currently holds the Ring Magazine, WBC, WBA, WBO and IBF middleweight titles. On June 3, Shields defended her crown against Maricela Cornejo and shut her out on all three scorecards.

Shields is not just a phenomenal athlete. She is also an amazing self-promoter. She uses many of the tools the internet provides to promote herself.

The GWOAT (Greatest Woman Of All Time) is what she calls herself. She just might be. She is without question headed for Canastota in years to come. However, as great as her accomplishments have been, and as dominating as she continues to be, the GWOAT is P4P over everybody except a fighting machine named Seniesa "Superbad" Estrada.

Estrada has held two world titles at junior flyweight and is the current Ring Magazine/WBC/WBA strawweight titleholder. She is coming off a title-unification win over Tina Rupprecht, who entered their bout with a 16-0 record. Had this been a baseball game with Estrada pitching, she would have pitched a perfect game!

In July 2020, Estrada KO'd 5-0 Miranda Adkins in just seven seconds – the fastest female knockout ever recorded. Granted, Adkins acquired her 5-0 record against weak opposition.

It's not that the GWOAT has been demoted on my personal P4P list. It's just that the incredibly gifted Estrada has been elevated, and the only way to get to No. 1 was to go above Claressa Shields.

Let's see if Estrada can hold onto that No. 1 spot with another superhuman, Superbad performance in her next fight, scheduled before the end of July.

Here is my list of the P4P best female boxers in the world:

1. Seniesa Estrada
2. Claressa Shields
3. Chantelle Cameron
4. Katie Taylor
5. Amanda Serrano
6. Alycia Baumgardner
7. Franchon Crews-Dezurn
8. Jessica McCaskill
9. Shadasia Green
10. Savannah Marshall

As for the men, in the last year, more and more boxing authorities have moved "The Monster," Naoya Inoue, to the No. 1 spot amongst male boxers, jumping over guys such as Canelo Alvarez and Terence Crawford. Perhaps a dazzling display by either Crawford or Errol Spence will move them ahead of Inoue. RING

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# NEW FACES

By Anson Wainwright

# ALBERT RAMIREZ

**AGE:** 31
**BORN:** El Vigia, Venezuela
**HOMETOWN:** Valledupar, Colombia
**WEIGHT CLASS:** Light heavyweight
**HEIGHT:** 5-foot-11½ (182 cm)
**AMATEUR RECORD:** 176-21 (roughly)
**TURNED PRO:** 2018
**PRO RECORD:** 16-0 (15 knockouts)
**TRAINER:** Jacobo Chrismatt
**MANAGER:** Karim Bouzidi
**PROMOTER:** Eye of The Tiger
**INSTAGRAM:** @albert.ramirez.duran

**BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY:** In 2022, Ramirez notched two impressive wins in Argentina, a unanimous decision over Facundo Galovar in March and a first-round knockout of Braian Suarez in June. He doesn't favor the one you might expect.

"With Galovar, I did 10 rounds, and I really had to put 10 strong rounds into fighting with this guy," Ramirez told The Ring through manager Karim Bouzidi. "In the fight with Suarez, I just showed strength, power and speed, but with Galovar, I had to put everything in. That I was capable of doing 10 rounds, move my head, to receive [punches], to defend, to hit, to build a strategy – that's why I prefer that fight."

**WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY:** The Venezuelan-born fighter is least happy with his most recent outing, a fourth-round stoppage of savvy veteran Ricardo Luna in Mexico.

"I went too quick; I was desperate to stop the guy in one round, and I had to fight four rounds," he said. "The guy was tough and hit hard, so definitely [I'm not satisfied with] this one. I should have fought with a cool head from the beginning of the fight."

**WHAT'S NEXT:** Ramirez will likely be back in the ring in France in early September. The details are still being finalized.

**WHY HE'S A PROSPECT:** Ramirez has an extensive amateur background. The 31-year-old was a five-time national champion, won bronze at the Pan-American games, and fought in the World Series of Boxing before representing his country at the 2016 Olympics.

Ramirez has honed his skills as a pro, and his development has doubtlessly been aided by spending eight weeks in Russia training and sparring with IBF/WBC/WBO light heavyweight titlist Artur Beterbiev.

"I gave everything to Artur," he said. "I learned from every single moment I spent with him. I believe it was the best sparring for Artur. I am really happy with that."

Those sessions convinced Beterbiev's head trainer, Marc Ramsay, who is also the development director and head coach of Eye of the Tiger, that Ramirez would be a strong addition to the stable.

"I know Albert Ramirez from the amateur ranks," said Ramsay. "He had caught my attention also in WSB, where he did very well, but it was really when I invited him to training camp in Moscow, Russia, with Artur Beterbiev that he impressed me.

"Not only is he a good boxer, but he demonstrates an outstanding work ethic. It was at this moment that the idea of signing him came to me.

"Although we will move him up the rankings in the coming months, Albert doesn't need matchmaking protection. I think he has everything now to face the best in the division."

EOTT President Camille Estephan was only too happy to broker a deal on Ramsay's suggestion.

"He's a guy that has been developed. He's very strong. He's mature. He's at the age now where he can take on any of the big boys. It's just about positioning him," explained Estephan. "When we were talking to him, we looked at him on so many different levels, and we think he's of the level to be in the ring with the top two or three guys. I think he's going to become a world champion."

**WHY HE'S A SUSPECT:** Ramirez has been a professional for five years and has fought 16 times, which isn't bad, but his career has lacked direction up to this point. Due to that, he has at times looked like he's been going through the motions against lesser opponents.

The southpaw is a well-rounded fighter, solid across the board, but may not be exceptional in any one area. That remains to be seen.

However, now that he has a promoter behind him, Ramirez will have a clear path to greater challenges in the ring.

"I feel like a world champion. I am just waiting for the opportunity," he said. "The next two fights will be good for me to get ready, to continue to prepare. I am learning from every fight."

With the deep reservoir of amateur experience behind Ramirez, Ramsay doesn't believe he needs to significantly improve in a particular area; it is more fine-tuning at this stage: "The only thing he still lacks is a little professional experience, and that we will provide him."

**STORYLINES:** Ramirez was born in El Vigia, Venezuela, and is one of five children.

"When I was born, my mother and father split. I didn't get to know my father until I was 14," he said. "My mother was the father and mother. I grew up without a father. We speak but are not close."

Growing up in El Vigia had its difficulties for the Ramirez family.

"It was quite a humble existence, not a lot of money," he said, emotionally recalling his early days. "I know what is good and bad in life. I decided to follow the good side. I know the bad side is good for a short moment and the good side is a long time."

His introduction to boxing came as a teenager.

"When I was young, I used to go and see my two cousins boxing," said Ramirez. (One of those cousins is Jose Uzcategui, who held the IBF super middleweight title from 2018-19.) "I went to the gym and started to play with the bags when I was 13, and then started to take it seriously and figured out I had a dream about boxing."

By the time he was 16, Ramirez had won silver at the national games and was invited to box on the national team.

"It was an experience for me," he said.

Bouzidi has known Ramirez since his days in the WBS and was only too happy to work with him in the professional ranks.

"I've crossed paths with many boxers, and every boxer has their own story, but in the case of Albert, I think the fact he grew up without a father is not something nice, but it definitely helped him keep a straight line for his development," said Bouzidi. "He is a very good human. He's good when he's in the ring. He's a beast when he fights and out of the ring wants to help people. I've never seen him with a bad attitude towards people. I have no doubt he will be a world champion; he deserves it so much."

Venezuela has crowned 35 world champions. Ramirez hopes to be the next fighter to join his country's rich boxing history and follow the likes of Jorge Linares, Antonio Esparragoza and Leo Gamez.

Ramirez is married with two children and lives in Valledupar, Colombia. RING

*Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.*

# ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES +

## FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY DOUG FISCHER

# TEOFIMO LOPEZ

Twenty-one "experts" participated in a Fight Picks poll for the Josh Taylor-Teofimo Lopez fight that was published on RingTV.com the week of the anticipated June 10 junior welterweight championship.

Of the 21 – a group comprised of six Ring Magazine staffers (including Yours Truly) and 15 boxing insiders (including recent IBHOF inductee Tim Bradley; The Ring's 2022 Trainer of the Year, Bob Santos; and 140-pound standouts Regis Prograis and Jose Zepeda) – not one picked Lopez to beat the reigning Ring Magazine/WBO champ.

So, what's the lesson here (apart from betting the house on the underdog the next time a Fight Picks crew unanimously sides with the odds favorite)? Never count out a special talent like Lopez (19-1, 13 KOs), who forced a lot of crow down a lot of throats by outclassing Taylor to a unanimous decision victory.

In defense of those polled, most believed it would be a competitive fight (stylistically favoring Lopez), and many considered the former lightweight champ to be a live dog. However, when it came time to make a pick, they couldn't go against the vastly more accomplished fighter at junior welterweight.

Taylor (19-1, 13 KOs) looked awful in his previous title defense, a split decision over Jack Catterall last February that most observers thought he deserved to lose. The inactivity, canceled rematches with Catterall, plus Taylor's well-known struggles to make 140 pounds added to the X factors of the matchup. However, at the end of the day, Taylor had paid the cost to be the boss of the 140-pound division. He beat Prograis in 2019 and Jose Ramirez in 2021 to earn undisputed champion status.

And as brilliant as Lopez looked in upsetting Vasiliy Lomachenko for the lightweight championship in October 2020, The Ring's 2020 co-Fighter of the Year looked like an average pug battling 12 bloody rounds with unheralded George Kambosos Jr., who outpointed him in the 2021 Upset of the Year. Lopez moved up to junior welterweight last year, but he didn't look like a world-beater stopping Pedro Campa and barely outpointing Sandor Martin.

The magic just wasn't there, and even Lopez questioned if he still had it while still in the ring following his split decision over Martin.

But despite his self-doubt, poor recent form and the well-documented chaos of his personal life, Lopez found himself on June 10 and reminded us all why we were so high on him in the first place.

Lopez was loose but confident from the opening bell, relaxed in the face of Taylor's early-rounds aggression but always ready to counterpunch with authority. The 25-year-old power-boxer was fast and elusive while being economical and accurate with his punches. He was in command by Round 4, almost casually walking down the bigger, rangier fighter. By Round 8, he was landing his patented "jump-punch," controlling the raucous pro-Lopez crowd inside Madison Square Garden's Hulu Theater as much as he was the respected Scotsman in the ring.

Lopez's combinations became more fluid as his punches packed more power down the stretch of the fight. Only Taylor's pride and world-class chin saw him to the final bell.

Lopez, with his Ring Magazine lightweight and Fighter of the Year titles strapped around his waist, told the ringside media that he would retire immediately after the fight. Few took him at his word, until he relinquished the WBO belt five days after winning it.

He is still recognized as THE junior welterweight champion by The Ring, and he will soon receive a personalized version of the coveted title. We hope to see him in the ring again, but if he has called it a career, the Ring Ratings Panel is content to allow the young man to take a well-earned victory lap.



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# RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings covering fight results from June 16, 2023

Lomachenko (right) remained No. 1 at lightweight despite losing to Haney.

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

## RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

**POUND-FOR-POUND:** Devin Haney retained his full collection of lightweight belts after a unanimous decision over Vasiliy Lomachenko, but the division champ's victory was far from undisputed. Although both men had moments that reaffirmed their mage-level skills, and it could be argued that Loma once again waited too long to step on the gas, questionable scorecards (egregious, in the case of Dave Moretti's Round 10 score for Haney) left that all-too-familiar taint on the result. Reader Josiah Gampel put it this way in an email:

*"I've been trying to do my part in keeping the sweet science alive by inviting friends to watch all the big fights. I just wish something could be done about the scoring to get new fans interested."*

It's almost like this has become a problem. Nobody on the Ratings Panel used the word "robbery" – at least one scored it a draw and some acknowledged the possibility of doing a head-on-the-floor backbend to score it for Haney – but the general opinion was that the Ukrainian got the better of the bigger American, who was fighting not far from his home address. Still, there's been a lingering sense among some that Haney has been kept off the P4P list too long, and others believe the panel has been too lenient with Loma in recent years. The final call was to bring Haney in at No. 8 and drop Lomachenko from No. 7 to No. 10. The former No. 10, Gervonta Davis, was saved from expulsion when the panel opted to drop the inactive Jermell Charlo (No. 9) instead.

Josh Taylor (No. 7 last month) then dropped off the list when he lost by unanimous decision to Teofimo Lopez – this following the Scotsman's widely panned victory-on-paper against Jack Catterall in early 2022. Lopez, who looked great for his part, hung his new Ring belt on a hook at No. 9.

**CRUISERWEIGHT:** Chris Billam-Smith's upset majority decision over defending WBO titleholder Lawrence Okolie (read more about that in the U.K. section of "World Beat") lifted him from No. 10 into the No. 4 slot, with the previously No. 1-rated Okolie plunging to No. 6.

**SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT:** In his first full-fledged stab at 168, Jaime Munguia's final-round knockdown made the difference in edging a unanimous decision over Sergiy Derevyanchenko. Both were rated at middleweight last month, and while the Ukrainian's future home isn't certain, Munguia said he's at 168 (or more) for good, so he crept onto the list at No. 9 as a result of the win.

**MIDDLEWEIGHT:** Zhanibek Alimkhanuly (No. 3 last month) defended his WBO title with a three-knockdown, second-round knockout of Paul Butler (the perfect slip/counter left uppercut that set up the first knockdown was a gem) and was promoted to the spot just below countryman Gennadiy Golovkin. If you're intrigued by the idea of a Qazaq Style vs. GGG civil war, don't get your hopes up. According to Alimkhanuly, fighting his "brother" won't happen.

No. 3-rated Munguia's migration to super middleweight created a space at No. 10 for undefeated Arizona native Elijah Garcia (Derevyanchenko stayed put at No. 6).

**JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT:** Brian Castano (No. 2 last month) hasn't fought since his rematch loss to Jermell Charlo in May 2022, so he was removed and Charles Conwell was installed at No. 10.

**WELTERWEIGHT:** Alexis Rocha (No. 10 last month) bullied Anthony Young for four rounds, softened him up with a few body shots and then knocked him out with a heavy left in the fifth, rising to No. 8 as a result.

With 14 months of inactivity, Yordenis Ugas (No. 4 last month) fell victim to housecleaning, creating a vacancy for once-beaten Venezuelan Roiman Villa at No. 10.

**JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT:** No. 9-rated Alberto Puello was removed after testing positive for clomiphene (typically used to kickstart egg production in women) ahead of his Showtime date with Rolando Romero (unrated). The resulting vacancy at No. 10 was filled by Sandor Martin.

Teofimo's upset win over Taylor, who went into the fight as the Ring/WBO champion, sparked a debate on the panel about where to place the Scotsman. One panelist offered this list of shortcomings: "Taylor is nowhere near the best guy at 140. I'm a big resume guy, but Taylor just hasn't looked like the same guy. The sharpness is gone. The intensity isn't there. He's getting beat to the punches. His reflexes aren't what they were. And I'm someone who had Taylor edging Catterall." On the other hand, Taylor holds a win over the guy who was sitting at No. 1, Regis Prograis. That was in 2019, though. The discussion ended with Taylor being demoted only to the No. 1 contender spot, pushing Prograis to No. 2. That decision was at least somewhat backed up by Prograis' lackluster split decision win against Danielito Zorrilla the following weekend.

**LIGHTWEIGHT:** Haney's win had no effect on the order here; he's still the "C" and Lomachenko is still the No. 1 contender.

Undefeated Californian Raymond Muratalla replaced Keyshawn Davis at No. 10 after stopping Jeremia Nakathila in the second round.

**FEATHERWEIGHT:** In the immediate rematch of his seventh-round stoppage loss to Mauricio Lara in February, Leigh Wood reclaimed his WBA strap with a unanimous decision over the Mexican in Manchester. Lara, whose loss was made worse by ridiculously missing weight, was dropped from No. 1 to No. 6, and Wood went from No. 7 to No. 3. That same night in Belfast, Luis Alberto Lopez pissed on the local parade by knocking out Michael Conlan in the fifth round with a right uppercut. As a result, Conlan (No. 9 last month) was ejected from the list and Lopez (No. 3 last month) went to No. 1.

**JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT:** Sam Goodman (No. 10 last month) took down No. 5-rated Ra'eese Aleem with another one of those split decisions that makes you question the whole system (how can one judge see it 117-111 for Goodman while another has it 116-112 for Aleem?), but the result was correctly in favor of the late-surging Australian. He jumped all the way to No. 5 with the victory, pushing Aleem to No. 6.

**BANTAMWEIGHT:** Jason Moloney fulfilled half of the dream he and his twin brother, Andrew, had of becoming world titleholders simultaneously, scoring a too-slim majority decision over Vincent Astrolabio to snag the vacant WBO belt. With the win, Jason moved from No. 2 to No. 1 and Astrolabio dropped from No. 4 to No. 6.

**JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT:** On the weekend following his brother's triumph, Andrew Moloney (No. 8 last month) wasn't so fortunate against Junto Nakatani, who claimed the WBO title with a one-punch knockout in Round 12. The Japanese southpaw was elevated from No. 6 to No. 3 while Moloney fell to No. 10 and said afterward that he'll most likely try his luck at flyweight.

**FLYWEIGHT:** McWilliams Arroyo (No. 6 last month) has been chasing a rematch of his no-contest bout with Julio Cesar Martinez in November 2021, but he has yet to nail down a fight while Martinez (No. 2) has been in the ring three times since then. Arroyo was thus dropped and Seigo Yuri Akui returned at No. 10.

**JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT:** Former Ring champion Hiroto Kyoguchi (No. 2 last month) departed the list for a move to 112 pounds, which he sealed with a unanimous decision over Roland Jay Biendima, so everyone moved up a notch and Regie Suganob entered at No. 10.

Headbutts cost Daniel Matellon (No. 6 at the time) two points and ultimately a technical decision loss against Carlos Canizales (No. 8); they settled at Nos. 7 and 6, respectively.

Esteban Bermudez (No. 8 at the time) was dropped, having gone fightless for a year since his loss to Kyoguchi last June, which opened up a spot for Filipino Miel Fajardo at No. 10.

**STRAWWEIGHT:** Melvin Jerusalem transferred his WBO title and No. 3 ranking to Oscar Collazo (No. 10 last month) after the defending champion declined to answer the bell inviting him to eat more punches in the eighth round. Jerusalem took a seat at No. 8.

## P4P

1 **OLEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)

2 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)

3 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)

4 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)

5 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 59-2-2 (39 KOs)

6 **DMITRY BIVOL**
Russia • 21-0-0 (11 KOs)

7 **DEVIN HANEY**
U.S. • 30-0-0 (15 KOs)

8 **GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 29-0-0 (27 KOs)

9 **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

10 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 17-3-0 (11 KOs)

**Devin Haney finally entered the pound-for-pound ratings by outpointing future Hall of Famer Vasiliy Lomachenko.**

### HEAVYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT UNLIMITED*

C **OLEKSANDR USYK** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO
Ukraine • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
1 **TYSON FURY** WBC
U.K. • 33-0-1 (24 KOs)
2 **DEONTAY WILDER**
U.S. • 43-2-1 (42 KOs)
3 **ANTHONY JOSHUA**
U.K. • 25-3-0 (22 KOs)
4 **ZHILEI ZHANG**
China • 25-1-1 (20 KOs)
5 **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
U.S. • 35-2-0 (22 KOs)
6 **DILLIAN WHYTE**
U.K. • 29-3-0 (19 KOs)
7 **JOE JOYCE**
U.K. • 15-1-0 (14 KOs)
8 **LUIS ORTIZ**
Cuba • 33-3-0 (28 KOs)
9 **JOSEPH PARKER**
New Zealand • 32-3-0 (22 KOs)
10 **FILIP HRGOVIC**
Croatia • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

### CRUISERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS*

C **JAI OPETAIA** RING, IBF
Australia • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
1 **MAIRIS BRIEDIS**
Latvia • 28-2-0 (20 KOs)
2 **YUNIEL DORTICOS**
Cuba • 26-2-0 (24 KOs)
3 **BADOU JACK** WBC
Sweden • 28-3-3 (17 KOs)
4 **CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH** WBO
U.K. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
5 **ILUNGA MAKABU**
Congo • 29-3-0 (25 KOs)
6 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE**
U.K. • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)
7 **RICHARD RIAKPORHE**
U.K. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
8 **ALEKSEI PAPIN**
Russia • 15-1-0 (14 KOs)
9 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN**
France • 27-0-0 (18 KOs)
10 **MATEUSZ MASTERNAK**
Poland • 47-5-0 (31 KOs)

### LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS*

C **(VACANT)**
1 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA
Russia • 21-0-0 (11 KOs)
2 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC, WBO
Russia • 19-0-0 (19 KOs)
3 **CALLUM SMITH**
U.K. • 29-1-0 (21 KOs)
4 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ**
Mexico • 44-1-0 (30 KOs)
5 **JOE SMITH JR.**
U.S. • 28-4-0 (22 KOs)
6 **ANTHONY YARDE**
U.K. • 23-3-0 (22 KOs)
7 **JOSHUA BUATSI**
U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
8 **DAN AZEEZ**
U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
9 **OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**
U.K. • 19-1-0 (15 KOs)
10 **MICHAEL EIFERT**
Germany • 12-1-0 (4 KOs)

### SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS*

C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Mexico • 59-2-2 (39 KOs)
1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
U.S. • 27-0-0 (23 KOs)
2 **CALEB PLANT**
U.S. • 22-2-0 (13 KOs)
3 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI**
France • 24-0-0 (20 KOs)
4 **DAVID MORRELL**
Cuba • 9-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 **JOHN RYDER**
U.K. • 32-6-0 (18 KOs)
6 **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
U.S. • 34-3-2 (25 KOs)
7 **ERIK BAZINYAN**
Canada • 30-0-0 (21 KOs)
8 **VLADIMIR SHISHKIN**
Russia • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
9 **JAIME MUNGUIA**
Mexico • 42-0-0 (33 KOs)
10 **ZACH PARKER**
U.K. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES





### MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS*

C **(VACANT)**
1 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 42-2-1 (37 KOs)
2 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY** WBO
Kazakhstan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
3 **CARLOS ADAMES**
Dom. Rep. • 22-1-0 (17 KOs)
4 **LIAM SMITH**
U.K. • 33-3-1 (20 KOs)
5 **ERISLANDY LARA**
Cuba • 29-3-3 (17 KOs)
6 **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
Ukraine • 14-5-0 (10 KOs)
7 **MEIIRIM NURSULTANOV**
Kazakhstan • 19-0-0 (11 KOs)
8 **FELIX CASH**
U.K. • 16-0-0 (10 KOs)
9 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
U.K. • 32-3-0 (23 KOs)
10 **ELIJAH GARCIA**
U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

### JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS*

C **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
1 **TIM TSZYU**
Australia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)
2 **ERICKSON LUBIN**
U.S. • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)
3 **LIAM SMITH**
U.K. • 33-3-1 (20 KOs)
4 **BRIAN MENDOZA**
U.S. • 22-2-0 (16 KOs)
5 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
U.S. • 20-1-1 (13 KOs)
6 **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
Uzbekistan • 9-0-1 (6 KOs)
7 **JESUS RAMOS**
U.S. • 20-0-0 (16 KOs)
8 **TONY HARRISON**
U.S. • 29-4-1 (21 KOs)
9 **MICHEL SORO**
France • 35-4-2 (24 KOs)
10 **CHARLES CONWELL**
U.S. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

**Jaime Munguia (left) cracked the super middleweight rankings by edging Sergiy Derevyanchenko in a 12-round war.**

### WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS*

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBA, WBC
U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)
3 **JARON ENNIS**
U.S. • 30-0-0 (27 KOs)
4 **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
U.S. • 19-0-0 (19 KOs)
5 **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
Lithuania • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
6 **RADZHAB BUTAEV**
Russia • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
7 **ALEXIS ROCHA**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (15 KOs)
8 **CODY CROWLEY**
Canada • 22-0-0 (9 KOs)
9 **DAVID AVANESYAN**
Russia • 29-4-1 (17 KOs)
10 **ROIMAN VILLA**
Venezuela • 26-1-0 (24 KOs)

### JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS*

C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBO
U.S. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
1 **JOSH TAYLOR**
U.K. • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)
2 **REGIS PROGRAIS** WBC
U.S. • 29-1-0 (24 KOs)
3 **JOSE RAMIREZ**
U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 **SUBRIEL MATIAS** IBF
Puerto Rico • 19-1-0 (19 KOs)
5 **JACK CATTERALL**
U.K. • 27-1-0 (13 KOs)
6 **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
U.S. • 28-0-0 (10 KOs)
7 **JOSE ZEPEDA**
U.S. • 36-3-0 (27 KOs)
8 **GARY ANTUANNE RUSSELL**
U.S. • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)
9 **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
Uzbekistan • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
10 **SANDOR MARTIN**
Spain • 40-3-0 (13 KOs)

**Regis Prograis (left) remained the No. 2-rated junior welterweight with a split decision over Danielito Zorrilla.**

MUNGUIA: CRIS ESQUEDA/GOLDEN BOY PROMOTIONS VIA GETTY IMAGES

### LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS*

C **DEVIN HANEY** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 30-0-0 (15 KOs)
1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 17-3-0 (11 KOs)
2 **GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 29-0-0 (27 KOs)
3 **ISAAC CRUZ**
Mexico • 24-2-1 (17 KOs)
4 **RYAN GARCIA**
U.S. • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)
5 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 20-0-0 (10 KOs)
6 **FRANK MARTIN**
U.S. • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
7 **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
Australia • 20-2-0 (10 KOs)
8 **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
Mexico • 28-0-0 (24 KOs)
9 **MAXI HUGHES**
U.K. • 26-5-2 (5 KOs)
10 **RAYMOND MURATALLA**
U.S. • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

### JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS*

C **(VACANT)**
1 **OSCAR VALDEZ**
Mexico • 31-1-0 (23 KOs)
2 **HECTOR GARCIA** WBA
Dom. Rep. • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
3 **JOE CORDINA** IBF
U.K. • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)
4 **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
U.S. • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)
5 **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
Russia • 17-1-1 (14 KOs)
6 **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
Brazil • 17-2-0 (8 KOs)
7 **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
Venezuela • 27-4-1 (21 KOs)
8 **KENICHI OGAWA**
Japan • 27-2-1 (19 KOs)
9 **LAMONT ROACH**
U.S. • 23-1-1 (9 KOs)
10 **ALBERT BELL**
U.S. • 23-0-0 (6 KOs)

### FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS*

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ** IBF
Mexico • 28-2-0 (16 KOs)
2 **REY VARGAS** WBC
Mexico • 36-1-0 (22 KOs)
3 **LEIGH WOOD** WBA
U.K. • 27-3-0 (16 KOs)
4 **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
U.S. • 24-1-1 (18 KOs)
5 **ROBEISY RAMIREZ** WBO
Cuba • 12-1-0 (7 KOs)
6 **MAURICIO LARA**
Mexico • 26-3-1 (19 KOs)
7 **MARK MAGSAYO**
Phil. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
8 **JOSH WARRINGTON**
U.K. • 31-2-1 (8 KOs)
9 **REIYA ABE**
Japan • 25-3-1 (10 KOs)
10 **RUBEN VILLA**
U.S. • 20-1-0 (7 KOs)

### JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS*

C **(VACANT)**
1 **STEPHEN FULTON** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **MARLON TAPALES** IBF, WBA
Phil. • 37-3-0 (19 KOs)
3 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**
Uzbekistan • 11-1-0 (8 KOs)
4 **LUIS NERY**
Mexico • 34-1-0 (26 KOs)
5 **SAM GOODMAN**
Australia • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
6 **RA'EESE ALEEM**
U.S. • 20-1-0 (12 KOs)
7 **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
Armenia • 21-4-0 (17 KOs)
8 **RONNY RIOS**
U.S. • 33-4-0 (16 KOs)
9 **ZOLANI TETE**
S. Africa • 30-4-0 (23 KOs)
10 **MIKE PLANIA**
Phil. • 28-2-0 (15 KOs)

# RATINGS

Through fights as of June 17, 2023

## BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 JASON MOLONEY** WBO
  Australia • 26-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **2 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **3 NONITO DONAIRE**
  Phil. • 42-7-0 (28 KOs)
- **4 GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5 ALEJANDRO SANTIAGO**
  Mexico • 27-3-5 (14 KOs)
- **6 VINCENT ASTROLABIO**
  Phil. • 18-4-0 (13 KOs)
- **7 PAUL BUTLER**
  U.K. • 34-3-0 (15 KOs)
- **8 TAKUMA INOUE** WBA
  Japan • 18-1-0 (4 KOs)
- **9 RYOSUKE NISHIDA**
  Japan • 7-0-0 (1 KO)
- **10 KEITA KURIHARA**
  Japan • 17-7-1 (15 KOs)

## JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS*

- **C JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBC
  Mexico • 44-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1 ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 51-4-0 (41 KOs)
- **2 KAZUTO IOKA**
  Japan • 29-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **3 JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 25-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **4 JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-3 (8 KOs)
- **5 FERNANDO MARTINEZ** IBF
  Argentina • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **6 KOSEI TANAKA**
  Japan • 19-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **7 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 52-6-1 (44 KOs)
- **8 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 37-6-1 (25 KOs)
- **9 DAVID CUELLAR**
  Mexico • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10 ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 25-3-0 (16 KOs)

## FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 20-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **2 JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 20-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **3 ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4 JESSE RODRIGUEZ** WBO
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **5 ANGEL AYALA LARDIZABAL**
  Mexico • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **6 DAVID JIMENEZ**
  Costa Rica • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **7 RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 22-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **8 FELIX ALVARADO**
  Nicaragua • 39-3-0 (34 KOs)
- **9 CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 35-6-0 (21 KOs)
- **10 SEIGO YURI AKUI**
  Japan • 18-2-1 (11 KOs)

## JR. FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS*

- **C KENSHIRO TERAJI** RING, WBA, WBC
  Japan • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **1 JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 27-3-1 (14 KOs)
- **2 HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 35-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **3 ELWIN SOTO**
  Mexico • 20-3-0 (13 KOs)
- **4 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA** IBF
  S. Africa • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **5 MASAMICHI YABUKI**
  Japan • 15-4-0 (14 KOs)
- **6 CARLOS CANIZALES**
  Venezuela • 26-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **7 DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 13-1-2 (7 KOs)
- **8 SHOKICHI IWATA**
  Japan • 10-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **9 REGIE SUGANOB**
  Phil. • 13-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **10 MIEL FAJARDO**
  Phil. • 10-2-1 (9 KOs)

**Leigh Wood (right) jumped to the No. 3 spot at featherweight with a rematch decision victory over Mauricio Lara.**

**Jason Moloney (left) advanced to No. 1 at bantamweight with a majority decision over Vincent Astrolabio.**

## STRAWWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 24-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2 PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 39-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3 OSCAR COLLAZO** WBO
  U.S. • 7-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **4 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 55-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **6 YUDAI SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 7-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **7 DANIEL VALLADARES** IBF
  Mexico • 26-3-1 (15 KOs)
- **8 MELVIN JERUSALEM**
  Phil. • 20-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **9 RENE MARK CUARTO**
  Phil. • 21-4-2 (12 KOs)
- **10 WILFREDO MENDEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 18-3-0 (6 KOs)

## HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
*RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM*

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

GOODMAN: CHRIS HYDE/GETTY IMAGES; MOLONEY: MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK INC



# WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights as of June 17, 2023

## POUND FOR POUND

- **1 CLARESSA SHIELDS**
  U.S. • 14-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **2 CHANTELLE CAMERON**
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **3 KATIE TAYLOR**
  Ireland • 22-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **4 AMANDA SERRANO**
  Puerto Rico • 44-2-1 (30 KOs)
- **5 SENIESA ESTRADA**
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **6 JESSICA MCCASKILL**
  U.S. • 12-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **7 DELFINE PERSOON**
  Belgium • 48-3-0 (19 KOs)
- **8 ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER**
  U.S. • 14-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **9 MIKAELA MAYER**
  U.S. • 18-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **10 NATASHA JONAS**
  U.K. • 13-2-1 (8 KOs)

## SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS*

- **C FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 8-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **1 SHADASIA GREEN**
  U.S. • 12-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **2 ELIN CEDERROOS**
  Sweden • 8-2-0 (4 KOs)
- **3 CHRISTINA HAMMER**
  Germany • 28-1-0 (13 KOs)
- **4 JANINA NEUMANN**
  Germany • 5-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **5 RAQUEL MILLER**
  U.S. • 13-0-0 (6 KOs)

## MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS*

- **C CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 14-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **1 SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
  U.K. • 12-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **2 EMA KOZIN**
  Slovenia • 22-1-1 (12 KOs)
- **3 RAQUEL MILLER**
  U.S. • 13-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **4 MARICELA CORNEJO**
  U.S. • 16-6-0 (6 KOs)
- **5 OLIVIA CURRY**
  U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)

## JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS*

- **C NATASHA JONAS** RING, IBF, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 13-2-1 (8 KOs)
- **1 TERRI HARPER** WBA
  U.K. • 14-1-1 (6 KOs)
- **2 PATRICIA BERGHULT**
  Sweden • 16-1-0 (4 KOs)
- **3 HANNAH RANKIN**
  U.K. • 13-6-0 (3 KOs)
- **4 FEMKE HERMANS**
  Belgium • 16-4-0 (6 KOs)
- **5 CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
  Norway • 37-2-0 (9 KOs)

## WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS*

- **C JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 12-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **1 IVANA HABAZIN**
  Croatia • 21-5-0 (7 KOs)
- **2 MARIE PIER HOULE**
  U.S. • 8-1-1 (2 KOs)
- **3 VICTORIA BUSTOS**
  Argentina • 24-7-1 (0 KOs)
- **4 LAUREN PRICE**
  U.K. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
- **5 HEDDA WOLMARANS**
  S. Africa • 8-0-0 (5 KOs)

## JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS*

- **C CHANTELLE CAMERON** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO U.K. • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **1 SANDY RYAN**
  U.K. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
- **2 ERICA FARIAS**
  Argentina • 27-7-0 (10 KOs)
- **3 OSHIN DERIEUW**
  Belgium • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **4 MARY MCGEE**
  U.S. • 28-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **5 CHRISTINA LINARDATOU**
  Greece • 14-2-0 (6 KOs)

## LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS*

- **C KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  Ireland • 22-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **1 ESTELLE MOSSELY**
  Belgium • 11-0-0 (1 KOs)
- **2 MIKAELA MAYER**
  U.S. • 18-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **3 CAROLINE DUBOIS**
  U.K. • 7-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **4 ELHEM MEKHALED**
  France • 16-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **5 MAIRA MONEO**
  Uruguay • 12-1-0 (2 KOs)

## JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS*

- **C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** RING,IBF,WBA,WBC,WBO U.S. • 14-1-0 (7 KOs)
- **1 MIKAELA MAYER**
  U.S. • 18-1-0 (5 KOs)
- **2 MAIVA HAMADOUCHE**
  France • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **3 HYUN MI CHOI**
  South Korea • 20-0-1 (5 KOs)
- **4 BO MI RE SHIN**
  South Korea • 15-2-3 (8 KOs)
- **5 LEILA BEAUDOIN**
  Canada • 9-1-0 (1 KO)

## FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS*

- **C AMANDA SERRANO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO Puerto Rico • 44-2-1 (30 KOs)
- **1 ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ**
  Mexico • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **2 SARAH MAHFOUD**
  Denmark • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **3 JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
  Canada • 41-12-2 (19 KOs)
- **4 NINA MEINKE**
  Germany • 16-3-0 (4 KOs)
- **5 DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
  Argentina • 31-4-3 (11 KOs)

## JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE** WBO
  France • 17-0-0 (1 KO)
- **2 YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
  Mexico • 21-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **3 ELLIE SCOTNEY** IBF
  U.K. • 7-0-0 (0 KOs)
- **4 JULISSA GUZMAN**
  Mexico • 13-2-2 (7 KOs)
- **5 MAYERLIN RIVAS**
  Venezuela • 17-4-3 (11 KOs)

## BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 DINA THORSLUND** WBO
  Denmark • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2 YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
  Mexico • 25-3-1 (4 KOs)
- **3 EBANIE BRIDGES** IBF
  Australia • 9-1-0 (4 KOs)
- **4 NINA HUGHES** WBA
  U.K. • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
- **5 DIANA FERNANDEZ**
  Mexico • 27-4-1 (4 KOs)

## JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ASLEY GONZALEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 16-2-0 (7 KOs)
- **2 LOURDES JUAREZ**
  Mexico • 34-4-0 (4 KOs)
- **3 ADELAIDA RUIZ**
  U.S. • 14-0-1 (8 KOs)
- **4 MICAELA LUJAN** IBF
  Argentina • 11-1-1 (3 KOs)
- **5 MIZUKI HIRUTA**
  Japan • 5-0-0 (1 KO)

## FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS*

- **C MARLEN ESPARZA** RING,WBA,WBC
  U.S. • 13-1-0 (1 KOs)
- **1 NAOKO FUJIOKA**
  Japan • 19-3-1 (7 KOs)
- **2 GABRIELA ALANIZ**
  Argentina • 14-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3 ARELY MUCINO** IBF
  Mexico • 32-3-2 (11 KOs)
- **4 KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
  Mexico • 26-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **5 GABRIELA FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

## JR. FLYWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 SENIESA ESTRADA**
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **2 JESSICA NERY PLATA** WBA, WBC
  Mexico • 29-2-0 (3 KOs)
- **3 EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF, WBO
  Argentina • 18-1-1 (6 KOs)
- **4 KIM CLAVEL**
  Canada • 17-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **5 LEONELA YUDICA**
  Argentina • 19-1-3 (1 KO)

## STRAWWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS*

- **C SENIESA ESTRADA** RING, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **1 YOKASTA VALLE** IBF, WBO
  Nicaragua • 28-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **2 CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
  Germany • 12-1-1 (3 KOs)
- **3 SARAH BORMANN**
  Germany • 17-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **4 ANABEL ORTIZ**
  Mexico • 33-5-0 (4 KOs)
- **5 JESSICA BASULTO**
  Mexico • 11-1-0 (3 KOs)

## ATOMWEIGHTS
*WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS*

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
  Czech Rep. • 20-0-2 (5 KOs)
- **2 MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
  Mexico • 18-4-2 (0 KOs)
- **3 YUKO KUROKI** WBO
  Japan • 21-7-2 (9 KOs)
- **4 MIKA IWAKAWA** IBF
  Japan • 12-6-1 (4 KOs)
- **5 SUMIRE YAMANAKA**
  Japan • 7-0-0 (3 KOs)

# IN SEARCH OF A SUPER FIGHT

PAST MEGA-EVENTS FEATURING WELTERWEIGHT STARS HAVE PRODUCED CLASSICS AS WELL AS DUDS. ARE SPENCE AND CRAWFORD UP TO THE TASK?

**By Nigel Collins**

**The best part of the Felix Trinidad-Oscar De La** Hoya match was when De La Hoya's promoter, Bob Arum, had one of his minions pull the plug on Don King's microphone. The rival promoter was in his glory, a bellowing braggart, verbally twisting the knife. Arum was already steamed about the controversial majority decision in Trinidad's favor and Oscar's bewildering fade the final three rounds. Uncle Bob couldn't change the result, but at least he knew how to shut up King. But even that stroke of magic couldn't hide the fact that the fight had been underwhelming compared to all expectations, like your paycheck after taxes.

The "Tito" versus "Golden Boy" fight wasn't quite a case of one boxer not wanting to fight and the other glad of it – but close. Two knockout artists refusing to trade punches is a sign of mutual respect, I guess, but not to the fans who pay the boxers' wages. If they would have given it a go, it wouldn't have mattered as much who won.

The task at hand is trying to figure out whether the upcoming Errol Spence Jr.-Terence Crawford match is going to be closer to the first Sugar Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns match – one of the greatest welterweight title fights

RYAN HAFEY

JOSE JIMENEZ

Like Spence and Crawford, Oscar De La Hoya and Felix Trinidad were undefeated welterweight champs ranked in the pound-for-pound top five when they fought in 1999.

of all time – or the Trinidad-De La Hoya embarrassment.

Ever since Crawford moved up from junior welterweight to welterweight in 2018, boxing fans have been drooling over a match between Crawford and Spence. Negotiations dragged on and on for almost five years, so you couldn't blame boxing's beleaguered masses for figuring to hell with it, it's never going to happen. Then, unexpectedly, the script flipped.

Barring further delay, Crawford and Spence will meet July 29 at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, televised by Showtime PPV. The winner will be undisputed welterweight champion, covered in layers of belts, including The Ring's, and looking a bit like an upright armadillo with a big smile on its face. Nonetheless, the belts are secondary to what the public wanted all along, a violent confrontation between two of the best boxers in the word who just happen to be 147-pounders.

Spence-Crawford is the kind of match that promises much, but there are no guarantees. The best vs. the best does not always make the best fights. Nonetheless, when they do, marvelous things happen – boxing rises above its outlaw birthright and reminds us why we care. Putting aside the possibility of another impediment, we have a reasonably good chance of a splendid fight. Between them, Crawford and Spence are undefeated in 67 pro fights and have 52 knockouts. But numbers don't win fights, fighters do.

Floyd Mayweather's 12-round decision over Manny Pacquiao was the biggest money fight in boxing's history and it stunk like a dead rat in the wall. There were no knockdowns, no highlights, no meaningful exchanges, and neither was ever in danger of getting hurt. What did get hurt, and hurt badly, was the sport itself. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on a glorified sparring session. Any lackluster fight sucks, but when it happens at the highest level there are consequences beyond the

NIGEL RODDIS/GETTY IMAGES

ED ZURGA / STRINGER

ring. Many new customers, caught up in the hype, were probably asking themselves, "Is that all there is?"

**Crawford and Spence are as** good as it gets these days and have an opportunity to compensate for the disappointing PPVs and superfights we've endured. Their skillsets are off the chart, their records pristine. As far as we know, they can do just about anything in the ring, so there's little gained by dissecting physical attributes. How their bodies perform on the night will play out in plain sight, but whatever is in their hearts and minds will go a long way toward what happens when the bell rings.

"Bud" Crawford once tweeted, "I fight so hard because I've been scared since a child." For a skinny little kid living in a dangerous part of Omaha with a father away in the military, fighting was mandatory. He might have been scared, but Bud got good at it. Real good.

Crawford is reminiscent of Bernard Hopkins, and like B-Hop, the 35-year-old Crawford has become the consummate pro, understanding the nuances of the sweet science, using his boxing IQ as much as his fists. The Nebraskan is quick and purposeful on his feet, fast with his hands and can end a fight quickly. Mid-fight adjustments? No problem. He's like a geometrician in the ring, and once he's figured out the correct angle of attack, he goes to work.

He'll be facing a slightly younger man in the 33-year-old Spence, a guy who has bounced back from flipping his Ferrari 488 Spider multiple times. Spence was saved because he wasn't wearing a seatbelt and was therefore tossed from the car. He posted on social media that he felt "like Superman." Whether it was luck, fate or the absence of Kryptonite, the only real physical damage was to Errol's face. When the plastic and dental surgeons were done, the only difference was that he looked a little bit more like a fighter. That's all. An incredible escape from certain death.

After his car crash, Spence

made a profound lifestyle change by purchasing a 60-acre ranch in DeSoto, Texas, south of Dallas. "I really can't tell you why I bought [the ranch]," Spence told writer Bob Velin. "Once I did, I started buying horses and I bought more cattle and fixed the place up. It gave me peace of mind after living downtown. And the serenity of being here in my backyard … nobody bothered me. It's a beautiful thing after being in a high-rise.

"I was just trying to find answers, you know. I needed to go somewhere new and start over and get out of the dark cloud that was downtown and be in a better place, because I'm already like an introvert."

A video of the champ grooming one of his horses, decked out in colorful shorts, rubber boots and a green baseball cap pretty much sums up life at the ranch, where he lives with his children. Boxing's version of *Green Acres*, minus Arnold Ziffel.

There is, however, nothing bucolic about his fighting style. Spence likes to move in behind his southpaw jab, throw a left to the body and then a left to the head, or maybe a pair of left uppercuts. He applies pressure relentlessly, working hard to break down his man. But staying in the pocket too long can be dangerous, as Spence discovered in an April 2022 welterweight unification bout with Yordenis Ugas.

In the sixth round, Ugas sent Spence flying halfway across the ring and into the ropes with a terrific right to the head. The Texan bounced off the ropes like a WWE wrestler and back into the fray. Ugas' only chance of victory had passed, and Spence pounded the Cuban's right eye shut and the fight was stopped at 1:44 of the tenth round.

Crawford is unlikely to put himself in position to be hit anywhere near as frequently as Ugas was by Spence, but Bud was rocked by his most recent opponent, David Avanesyan, prior to knocking out the Russia-born Armenian in the sixth round. Neither Spence nor Crawford has been knocked down as a pro, but the Ugas and Avanesyan incidents proved they're not invulnerable.

Spence and Crawford will each be fighting the best adversary of their professional career. This can spook even the finest boxers, as I believe it did when Trinidad fought De La Hoya. This is not to say they were afraid of each other; I believe they were subconsciously worried about losing their undefeated records and superstar status. It made them both more wary than usual.

The antidotes for half-stepping when faced with a formidable challenge are self-belief and pride. That sounds obvious, corny even, but the bravest among us have doubts, and it takes awe-inspiring faith in your ability to conquer fear and go for broke against a daunting foe. It's easier to play it safe. You know, jab and move, jab and move, clinch, repeat, etc.

Despite sterling careers, neither Spence nor Crawford has had a signature fight, the one people will automatically associate with their names for years to come, their magnum opus perhaps. Win a signature fight and the boxer is liable to turn up on a late-night talk show, always a sign the fighter is nibbling at the edge of mainstream acceptance. Crawford vs. Spence has a decent shot at delivering that kind of fight, yet another motive for an audacious approach.

Combatants' prefight quotes are usually quickly forgotten, except when the winner reminds us, "I told you so." But early statements from Spence and Crawford were encouraging. "Our fight will be the most anticipated, action-packed fight in the past 30, 40 years," Spence said. "This is definitely a legacy fight."

"The fight will sell itself, because everybody knows what they're getting on fight night," Crawford said.

That depends on which "everybody" he's referring to. Yes, the hardcore boxing fans can hardly wait for the first bell to ring. There will be some newbies and casuals, too, but their numbers probably

# THE BEST AND THE WORST 147-POUND TITLE BOUTS

Ever since Boston's Paddy Duffy became the first welterweight champion of the gloved era (skin-tight gloves) by knocking out Billy McMillian on October 30, 1888, the division has been a popular mainstay of boxing. Here, in chronological order, are five samples of the greatest welterweight fights and five of the worst.

## THE STANDOUTS

### Jimmy McLarnin SD 15 Barney Ross, September 17, 1934

Four months earlier, Ross had defended the welter title with a split decision over McLarnin in front of around 60,000 fans at the Madison Square Garden Bowl in Long Island. When they fought again at the same venue, the Associated Press described it as "a dazzling duel that shifted first in one direction and then the other, then back and forth again through the entire 15 bristling rounds." Even though lots of fans thought Ross should have gotten the decision, it was selected by The Ring as Fight of the Year. Ross regained the title with a 15-round unanimous decision in 1935.

### Carmen Basilio KO 12 Tony DeMarco, November 30, 1955

Basilio had taken DeMarco's welterweight championship in June, but it was a good fight, so they did it again. DeMarco did much better in the rematch. He was outpunching the champ and leading 79-74, 78-67 and 79-73 after eight rounds. Then things changed. "Suddenly, DeMarco looked like he was fighting in slow motion as Basilio continued to work the body in the tenth," wrote Bert Sugar. An exhausted DeMarco was down twice in the eleventh, and referee Mel Manning stopped the fight to save the helpless boxer, who was hung up on the ropes. It was The Ring's 1955 Fight of the Year.

McLarnin (left) and Ross weigh in for their first fight on May 28, 1934.

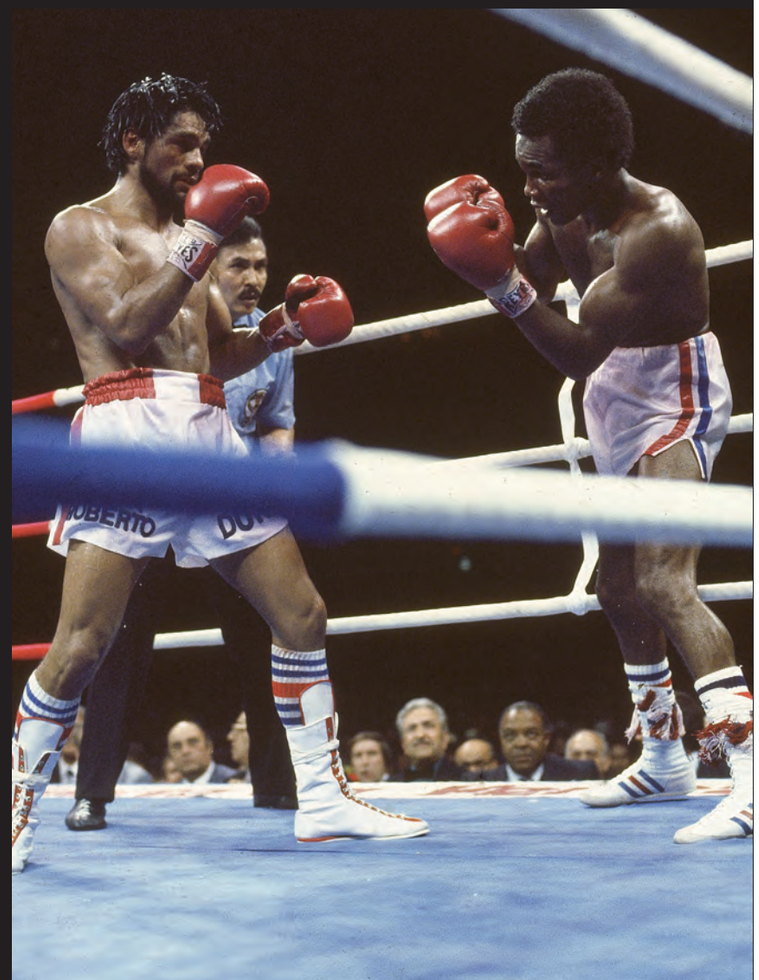
### Roberto Duran UD 15 Sugar Ray Leonard, June 20, 1980

Leonard, the WBC welterweight titleholder, was 27-0 with 18 KOs, while Duran was 71-1 with 56 KOs, a vast experience advantage. However, Leonard was a 9 to 5 favorite. The fight was held at Olympic Stadium in Montreal, the same venue where Leonard won an Olympic gold medal in 1976. The attendance was 46,317. "It was, from almost the opening salvo, a fight that belonged to Duran," wrote Bill Nack for Sport Illustrated. "The Panamanian seized the evening and gave it what shape and momentum it had." Although Duran deserved the decision, it wasn't the one-sided fight Nack's report indicated. Leonard fought back and had his share of moments.

Duran (left) had a little more than Leonard over 15 fierce rounds.

### Shane Mosley SD 12 Oscar De La Hoya, June 17, 2000

From the start, it was a passionate struggle between two magnificently conditioned athletes at the peak of their powers. The Staples Center was full to the brim with the 20,744 fans who got their money's worth regardless of which boxer they were rooting for. De La Hoya's best rounds were the fifth and sixth, when he momentarily slowed Mosley with left hooks to the body during several intense exchanges. Sugar Shane zapped Oscar with laser-like lefts and rights, darting in and out, shifting from side to side, but never running. Officially, at least, Mosley needed the 12th round to win the fight. Nothing was held back in the punch-filled finale. De La Hoya never stopped trying, never stopped letting his



MANNY MILLAN /SPORTS ILLUSTRATED VIA GETTY IMAGES

won't be as high as those that helped turn the Gervonta Davis-Ryan Garcia match into a financial bonanza.

Fair or not, at this point Davis and Garcia are more widely known and popular than Spence and Crawford, even though the latter have better resumes. Davis and Garcia turned out to be a one-sided fight, but the announced pay-per-view buys (1.2 million) and live gate at Vegas' T-Mobile Arena ($22.8 million) were already in the bank by the time Davis eviscerated Garcia with a left to the body in the seventh round.

The personality gap can make a significant difference. Davis is boxing's new bad boy and Garcia its latest heartthrob, which made them more marketable, but not necessarily better fighters. Spence and Crawford are just not as charismatic as Davis and Garcia, but an exceptional fight on July 29 would change that equation and elevate Errol and Bud in the minds of the paying public. Neither Marvin Hagler nor Thomas Hearns was particularly charismatic outside of the ring, but the dynamic fashion in which they fought superseded their personas.

Crawford is strictly business, a serious student of the game dedicated to his craft. "I'm a fan of the sport," he said. "A lot of times, I get to the fights real early and watch all the fights. I also like to see the top fighters in the world, see how they break down their opponents, what they do in certain circumstances. I look for anything where I can get an edge."

Without a shred of evidence of eroding skills, there have been concerns raised about the age difference, the lengthy layoff both have endured and the possibility that Crawford is starting to feel the weight of a longish career. While it's often said that a boxer can grow old

hands go, but Mosley outlanded "The Golden Boy" by an incredible 45 to 18 margin to win a split decision.

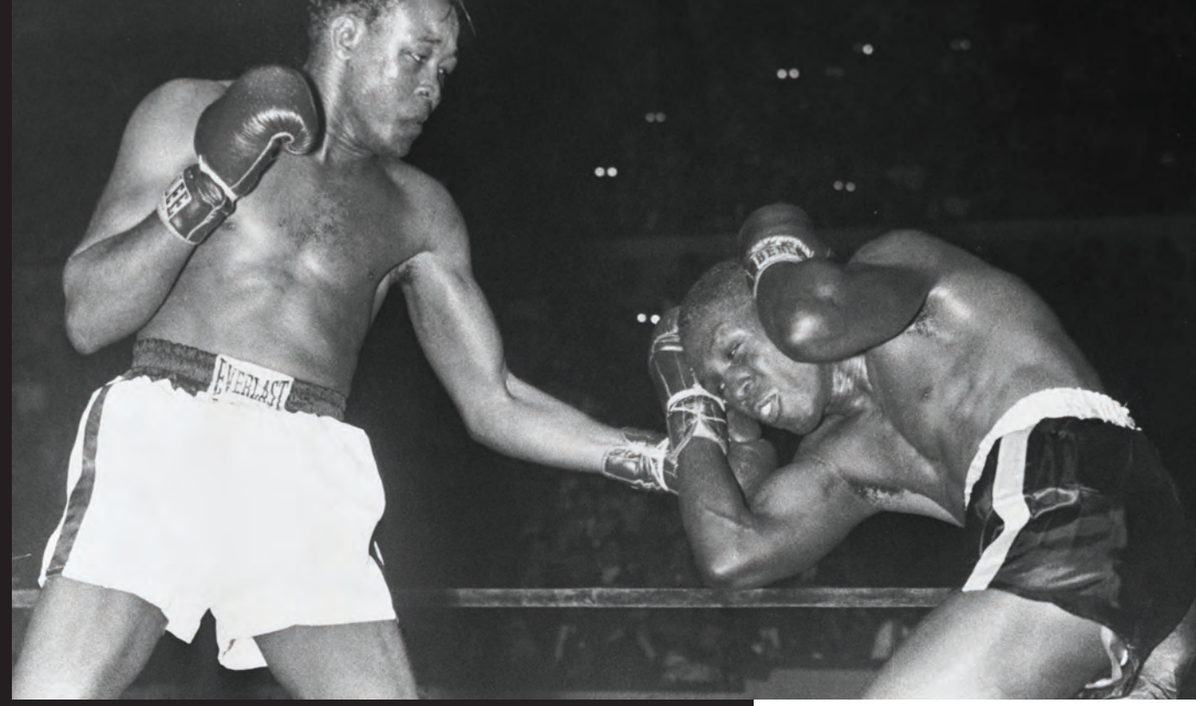
**Simon Brown KO 10 Maurice Blocker, March 18, 1991**
Brown was 13 when he and his pal Blocker emigrated from Jamaica. They settled in the Washington, D.C., area and had their first pro fights on the same card in Atlantic City. Brown won the vacant IBF welterweight title on April 23, 1988, with a 14th-round knockout of Tyrone Trice. On August 19, 1990, Blocker won a 12-round majority decision over Marlon Starling to annex the WBC welterweight belt. It seemed inevitable that the pair would eventually clash in a unification bout, and they did in Las Vegas on March 18, 1919. It was a suspenseful thriller. At 6-foot-2, Blocker had a five-inch advantage over the 5-foot-9 Brown and used his superior height and reach to keep Simon on the outside much of the time. Maurice was slightly ahead when Brown nailed him with a right hand and a whistling left hook in the tenth round. Both blows landed flush on the head, and Blocker went down hard. There wasn't a count. It was obvious Blocker was in no condition to continue, and Referee Mills Lane stopped the fight.

## THE STINKERS

**Joe Walcott WDQ 10 Mysterious Billy Smith, September 24, 1900**
Walcott and Smith had a six-fight series between 1895 and 1903. Walcott won the series 3-1-2, but it was never easy fighting the man known as "The Dirtiest Fighter Who Ever Lived." The match was held at the Charter Athletic Club in Hartford, Connecticut. According to Nat Fleischer, it was "a battle in which foul tactics prevailed." Apparently, Smith's were more egregious than Walcott's, because referee Johnny White disqualified him in the tenth round.

**Johnny Saxton UD 15 Kid Gavilan, October 20, 1954**
Both Saxton and Gavilan were connected to mobsters Frankie Carbo and Blinky Palermo. The fight, held at Philadelphia's Convention Hall, is generally considered a fix. Saxton was an unpopular jab-and-grab boxer, while Gavilan was a flashy showman who was so popular that he was on national TV 34 times. Saxton refused to make an offensive move; he just clinched whenever

Brown (right) did not let friendship get in the way of victory.



Gavilan's loss to Saxton (right) may not have been on the up and up.

Gavilan advanced. Insiders, including the press, knew beforehand that the fight wasn't on the level. Gavilan also benefited from the mob's devious methods, especially in his August 29, 1951, title defense against Billy Graham. When Gavilan won a 15-round split decision, the Madison Square Garden crowd erupted in a violent protest.

**Sugar Ray Leonard KO 8 Roberto Duran, November 25, 1980**
Six months after their first fight, Leonard and Duran fought the scandalous "No Mas" rematch in New Orleans. Leonard was ahead on all cards after seven rounds by scores of 67-66, 68-66 and 68-66, and though he didn't have an insurmountable lead, Sugar Ray was looking sharp. He was using his legs and hand speed to outbox "Manos de Piedra" and at times making him look foolish. Suddenly, Duran turned away from Ray, gestured with his hand and, according to common lore, uttered two words that will live forever in boxing infamy. There are many theories as to why Duran quit in the eighth round when he wasn't hurt, but none of them persuasive enough to justify his actions.

**Pernell Whitaker D 12 Julio Cesar Chavez, September 10, 1993**
Going in, Chavez was No. 1 in The Ring's pound-for-pound ratings and Whitaker was No. 2. Their styles were totally different. Chavez was a pressure fighter with a big punch, while southpaw Whitaker was a defensive genius and crisp counterpuncher. They fought in San Antonio at a catchweight of 145 pounds. Except for the fifth round, when Chavez connected well to the body and head, Whitaker was in charge, controlling the fight as Chavez grew progressively frustrated with Pernell's elusive style. When a draw verdict was announced, even some of the pro-Mexican fans booed. The outrageous decision is considered one of the worst in boxing history.

**Oscar De La Hoya KO 3 Patrick Charpentier, June 13, 1998**
Every now and then, a great event has a disappointing fight. Such was the case when De La Hoya fought (if that's the correct word) French challenger Charpentier. El Paso had fight fever, and it was a fun week with plenty of prefight events to attend. It seemed like every local we met was talking about the fight. The French challenger didn't stand a chance, but a crowd of 45,329 turned up at the Sun Bowl anyway. At least half of them were women infatuated by Oscar. "The Golden Boy" knocked Charpentier down three times in the third round, ending the bout at the 1:56 mark.

virtually overnight, there is usually some foreshadowing that occurs, some hint that he or she is beginning to decline. Crawford's recent performances indicate he's still in his prime and capable of winning the fight, as is Spence, who isn't all that much younger.

According to FanDuel, there is no favorite; both boxers are -112/-112 or -110/-110.

"As the fight gets closer, the odds will probably move a little bit, but I'm guessing they won't move a lot," said Eric Raskin, longtime boxing journalist and writer/editor for USBets.com. "I would be surprised if either guy gets priced more than a -150 favorite."

There are no wagers on whether a fight is going to be exciting or boring. That's entirely up to the matchmakers and participants. He wasn't writing about boxing, per se, but Bob Goff once wrote, "Most stories don't have the ending we would give them right away. The better endings come late." This might be one of them.

Spence and Crawford know it's a major chance to create a signature fight, raise their marketability and prove the boxing industry can produce a PPV worthy of being called a super fight.

THE RING MAGAZINE
BETTMANN

# THE CHAMPIONS CORNER:
# SPENCE VS. CRAWFORD

## EIGHTEEN FORMER WELTERWEIGHT TITLEHOLDERS BREAK DOWN THE UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONSHIP SHOWDOWN

**By Anson Wainwright**

**Spence and Crawford are interviewed after the New York City presser.**

**The welterweight fight that fans have demanded for five years is** finally upon us, and EVERYONE has an opinion on how it will play out.

Right up until Errol Spence Jr. and Terence Crawford step into the ring, the fans, media and boxing insiders will debate and argue over who has the edge in the showdown that will decide the world's best welterweight – and, arguably, who's No. 1 in the pound-for-pound rankings.

But what about the tough and talented men who fought their way to world titles in the always deep and competitive 147-pound division? The Ring's Anson Wainwright sought out 18 former welterweight champs to canvas their opinions on Spence-Crawford. The group includes two undisputed champs, four Ring Magazine champs and five Hall of Famers. Everyone interviewed envisions a hotly contested, evenly matched fight.

For some of the greats, it's too close to call.

"I want to see it. I want to be there. I just accept what it is. Back in my era, you fought the champions to prove why you were the best," Sugar Ray Leonard told The Ring in an interview for an upcoming story.

"I love all of these guys; that's why it's hard for me to select one over the other," he says. "Let's put it this way: If Muhammad Ali was asked, 'Could Ray beat Hagler?' and Ali said no, it would hurt me so bad. So I don't do that. But the best man will win."

Fair enough. Leonard isn't alone in not wanting to predict the winner. Two of the fighters polled by Wainwright – Hall of Famer Buddy McGirt and former unified/Ring Magazine champ Zab Judah – were either undecided or would not make a pick.

However, they were happy to share their insight and analysis on a matchup that truly excites them along with the other 16 former champs who represent five decades of great welterweight fights and performances. They are all part of a legacy that we hope Spence and Crawford will add to on July 29.

RYAN HAFEY

### JOHN H. STRACEY
RING MAGAZINE/WBC CHAMPION (1975-1976)

"They're both unbeaten; one's 29-0, the other's 39-0. I think it's going to be a cracking fight. It could be a defining moment. Whoever wins this is destined to go into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

"I think Crawford might just have enough to beat Spence. I think he has that little more ability. I think it'll be points. I think it'll be tight, because I think they're both capable of staying in the fight."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

### CARLOS PALOMINO
RING MAGAZINE/WBC CHAMPION (1976-1979)

"I'm excited to see the fight, but not many other people are. I think it's taken too long to make the fight happen and fans are fed up.

"I think Spence is great coming forward, putting pressure on opponents with good upper body movement, so he doesn't catch punches while he is walking in. Crawford is a great counterpuncher who can also initiate his offensive punches while boxing right in front of his opponent.

"Here's how I think the fight will progress. Pressure from Spence, who will be trying to land body shots in the early rounds. Maintain that upper-body movement so you will evade Crawford's counterpunches. If Spence can keep Crawford on his back foot trying to counter, he will have the upper hand and will win a decision."

PREDICTION: **SPENCE**

### AARON DAVIS
WBA TITLEHOLDER (1990-1991)

"I think it's gonna be a great fight. You have two guys who don't know how to lose. They both want to win the fight. They're not just doing it for themselves; Spence is doing it for everyone in Texas, Crawford is doing it for everyone in Nebraska. It's gonna be a helluva fight.

"Spence has very good basics. Crawford is strong, he can punch, but I believe when he feels Spence's power and strength, he might even go a little harder, and that's what might hurt him. Spence got hit by Ugas and got buckled. Crawford is going to take chances and I believe he's going to get hit more, and if Spence is 100 percent – we don't know what that car accident took out of Spence – I believe Spence can get him out of there. I think Spence stops him before eight rounds."

PREDICTION: **SPENCE**

### BUDDY MCGIRT
WBC TITLEHOLDER (1991-1993)

"I'm going to say, to be honest, it's a fight boxing needs and has needed for a long time. It's going to be very, very interesting. It's going to be a fight where the corners are going to come into play. There's going to be a lot that's going to determine the winner of that fight in my eyes.

"Spence brings a lot; he's a very good fighter, he does everything and he's always dominated when he's fought guys. Crawford, on the other hand, is good at setting traps, taking his time and figuring you out. That's what's going to be interesting.

"It's a really tough call. I just think it's a fight that every boxing fan should just sit back and enjoy. I think whoever is able to make the adjustments the quickest and the best, that's what's going to determine who wins the fight, because they're both smart, they're both tricky. If I had had $50 at the bookmakers, I'm taking that $50 and going to Fatburger! (laughs) I can't. It's tough. I don't want to pick one."

PREDICTION: **NO PICK**

## JOSE LUIS LOPEZ
### WBO TITLEHOLDER (1996)

"It's a great match between two undefeated fighters. I expect fireworks and I'm really excited. It's been a while since we had a big welterweight fight between two guys in their prime.

"Both have a lot of technique, power and are boxer-punchers. I think Crawford does everything a little better, and that's where I think the difference will be, and he will do just enough to win the fight. I like Crawford to win. There could be a knockout late in the fight, but I really doubt it."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

**The champs admire Spence's jab, pressure and infighting ability.**

## OSCAR DE LA HOYA
### WBC (1997-1999) (2000)

"This is an important fight for boxing. These megafights have to happen more often in the sport.

"Spence has an incredible jab and has great balance. Crawford has the speed and his combination punches are very accurate.

"It's a very even fight; it's going to come down to the last couple of rounds. The outcome is going to depend on who has more experience with high-level competition. I'm going with Crawford and sticking to Crawford; he has more weapons in his arsenal."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

## SHANE MOSLEY
### WBC TITLEHOLDER (2000-2002); WBA (2009-2010)

"I love the fight; I think it's going to be a terrific fight. It's a 50/50 fight. It depends who can take charge of the fight. Crawford is explosive and is always dangerous; he has the ability to turn the fight around in a couple of punches. Spence has been hurt, so has Crawford, but Spence has been hurt by Ugas. Crawford can turn southpaw; right-handed, they both have similar power. They have good speed, good timing. Spence is a little taller. I keep going back and forth.

"I'm still kind of [leaning toward] Crawford, but I can see Spence winning, depending how they approach the fight. I lean to Crawford because it seems he has more tools and he will make adjustments to try to win the fight. I think if it's on points, Crawford could win, but I think if it's on points it's more likely Errol Spence. If it's by knockout, it's gonna probably be more with Terence Crawford. I think Spence is going to be more careful and box really good, and it's going to be hard for Crawford to get in, and then Crawford has to make adjustments to get in and get the power punches off. It's just going to be a great fight. Anything can happen."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

BILL TOMPKINS / CONTRIBUTOR

## CORY SPINKS
### RING MAGAZINE/IBF/WBA/ WBC CHAMPION (2003-2005)

"I think it's a megafight. Both guys are in their primes and both are monsters, so I see an even playing field. Both of these guys are very well-rounded. Spence is the best inside fighter in boxing; I feel anybody who fights on the inside with Spence will get ate up. Crawford is a technician; he's a sharpshooter; he's very skilful from outside; he's a switch-hitter, so he can fight on both sides. It's a very interesting matchup, if Crawford can stay on his game plan and not get caught up on Spence's inside fight.

"Both of these guys are very skillful and can turn on the gas and get each other out of there. It's like an old rivalry match. I don't see how people can pick either or; it's a very tough one to pick. It's going to come down to whoever executes their game plan. I pick Spence. I don't know about a stoppage. The way Crawford is, I don't see him getting stopped. Crawford doesn't have a quitting bone in his body."

PREDICTION: **SPENCE**

## ZAB JUDAH
### RING MAGAZINE/IBF/WBA/ WBC CHAMPION (2005-2006)

"They're the two biggest and best fighters in the last decade to come around. It's the fight of today; it's the Sugar Ray Leonard-Tommy Hearns; it's the Sugar Ray Leonard-Marvin Hagler; it's the Tyson-Holyfield; it's the Mayweather-Pacquiao – it's that of today. Where we stand, that's the biggest fight to see.

"I think Spence brings pressure, brings a good jab, good boxing fundamentals. He's a big guy. Crawford brings aggressiveness, a ton of skills, very skillful fighter, where he punches at different angles, where he slides in and gives you different looks. One thing I like about Crawford is he punches with bad and mean intentions; this is why it makes this a hella firefight.

"I don't know. I'm going to that fight as a fan. I'm going to have my popcorn and my seat belt on and sit in my seat when the bell goes ding. I'm looking to watch a great, great fight of our decade. I favor the winner, because that guy is going to be the best guy that people see in a long time. I don't know. These are two great Spartan warriors, two great pugilists. There's no higher. This is like Harvard at its highest. If you gave me $500, I'd give it back to you and tell you, 'I don't know.' (laughs) At this standpoint, I truly don't know; this is a 50/50, toss-up fight. At any second, both of these guys possess the power to get it done. That's what makes a great, compelling, interesting fight. No matter what, I'm ringside!"

PREDICTION: **NO PICK**

## RICKY HATTON
### WBA TITLEHOLDER (2006)

"I think Spence vs. Crawford is a real 50/50 fight and a very tough one to pick a winner. Both lads haven't been the most active in the last few years, but when they have fought, they've both still looked really good. I thought the inactivity of Spence due to the car crash and eye injury could've affected him quite a lot at this stage of his career, but the way he dealt with Ugas last time out was brilliant.

"Spence puts the pressure on, but he's very smart with it, and I think he will look to apply pressure on Crawford from early, try and wear him down with bodyshots, then to put the combinations together later on in the fight.

"Crawford's a great technical boxer and can punch. I can't remember the last time he didn't stop an opponent. So I think Crawford is gonna try and box Spence a little bit early on, finding gaps and looking to land his power shots before upping the pace himself as well later in the fight.

"Either way, I think it's gonna be a great fight, and it's a real 50/50. I think this is a fight that could go either way depending who turns up on the night and whose game plan works best, but I'm gonna go with Spence on points."

PREDICTION: **SPENCE**

## KERMIT CINTRON
### IBF TITLEHOLDER (2006-2008)

"I think it's a good fight. It should have happened a year or two ago; it was more hyped back then. You have both guys who haven't fought in a while. To me, it's not going to be as exciting as when it was first brought up. Both are going to be rusty, and one of them is going to use it as an excuse. It's still going to be an exciting fight.

"Spence comes in shape. He's a smart fighter in the ring, good defense and offense as well, great combinations when he puts them together, very strong. Against Ugas, he showed nobody is going to be able to walk through him. I know at one point Ugas hurt him, but it seemed like Spence kind of turned away and looked at the ref and Ugas caught him with a clean shot. He's fit and strong and a good fighter overall. Crawford is a killer in the ring. He brings it; he puts in great combinations; he's in great shape. [Also there's] the fact that he's been tested; his chin has been tested. It seems like they're fairly evenly matched.

"I think it'll take a couple rounds for us to get any excitement. It's one of them fights where they're both going to be somewhat sitting back waiting to see what the other does. You might not see any action until the fifth or sixth round. In the second half of the fight, I think Crawford is going to pick it up and land a good shot, and that's when I think the fight gets going. It's a tough question [who wins].

"I think Crawford's going to win the fight. In my opinion, he's fought the better fighters, and to me he seems more rounded than Spence. I think somebody is going to get hurt. I don't think anybody is going to get dropped. If anybody does get dropped, it's going to be Spence, but I think it'll go to a decision. Crawford by majority decision."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

## PAUL WILLIAMS
### WBO TITLEHOLDER (2007-2008, 2008)

"I like that fight because it's 147, because that's my weight class. Who's the man? I don't want to see them running; I want a dog fight. Let's give them blood. Let's give the fans what we've all been talking about. They're both top dogs. What they've been doing to guys, now let's see y'all do it to each other, who can be that man, who can take it and give it.

"Errol is a big man, he can fight; he brings all that to the ring. Crawford is slick. I know they're both going to bring their A games to the fight. I like both guys and respect them. When it comes down to the fight game, it only takes one punch to change the whole night – I know about that; I got caught by one punch that changed the whole night.

"My prediction is if they both get in there and do what they do and put that dog work in and give the fans their money's worth, it's going to be a draw."

PREDICTION: **SPENCE**

## JOSHUA CLOTTEY
### IBF TITLEHOLDER (2008-2009)

"I think it's going to be a very tough fight. Both guys know how to win, and if you know how to win, you are a dangerous fighter. I think Crawford is a very skilled, smart fighter. He's the type of fighter who studies you, never rushes in the ring; he takes his time in the ring; he makes sure he does according to what he sees. Those kinds of fighters are very dangerous. Spence is very strong with his punches; I think Spence is the stronger of the two.

"I don't want to put my money on anybody. It's 50/50, but it wouldn't surprise me if Crawford won the fight. But if it's a knockout, it's going to be Spence."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

**The champs marvel at Crawford's skills, versatility and his swiftness in finishing off hurt opponents.**

DANIEL KUCIN JR./ICON SPORTSWIRE

## ANDRE BERTO
### WBC TITLEHOLDER (2008-2011), IBF (2011)

"About time! I think it's going to be one of the biggest fights of the decade. This is a fight everybody has been waiting on; not just the fight fans, but fighters in general. You're taking on two guys that are in the prime of their careers, undefeated and seem to be somewhat unstoppable, to the point it's really set up a big stage for them to clash. You don't see it too much in boxing. It's going to be a mega one. It's going to be a big win for the sport.

"Spence is relentless; it's always been his key. He's a hard worker. When he's in camp, he always works like it's his last, and you can see it in his fights. He really beats down his opponents. The way Spence beats up the body, the arms of his opponents is something Crawford has never seen. Of course, [Spence] has great skill, great distance – he's long, knows how to use his reach – but at the same time he really likes to get in there and get nasty with his opponents. He likes to out-will them. He likes to beat them up. He likes to be relentless and consistent, round after round doing that. I don't know if he has extreme one-punch power. Of course he's very strong, but [from] what I can see, he just likes to beat up his opponents. When you've got a fighter like that, he leaves long-lasting damage on his opponents.

"Crawford is bringing a lot of different things. He can switch back and forth. If he gets hurt, he comes back even meaner. He shows as the fight continues to go, he can adapt to pretty much any style and overcome. He shows his power at 147 pounds, like you saw in the [Shawn] Porter fight. He's long and wiry, but he's strong. He's mean. He likes to push his opponents around once he figures them out. He has a lot of different adaptations; he can stay in there and bang, but at the same time he can out-box his opponents. He has a lot of other different tools that make him very dangerous; he can outsmart you, out-skill you, or he can go out there and get you out of there.

"This is a 50/50. Whoever comes into this fight 100 percent is going to win. Both guys have tremendous advantages, and at the same time I see both guys with faults the other can capitalize on. I can see it going two different ways. Crawford has been knocked down and hurt, but it always comes early in the fight. I can see Spence hurting Crawford early and putting the gas on it and trying to get him out of there; I can see it going that way. But I can also see it on Crawford's side, just him having that strength, meanness and boxing ability. I can see Spence's aggressive pressure

**Spence and Crawford pose at the kick-off presser in Los Angeles.**

getting himself in trouble, over-leveraging himself. I think Crawford may have an edge, but I can't be definite on that. I don't think it goes the distance."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

## RANDALL BAILEY

IBF TITLEHOLDER (2012)

"I feel this fight had to be made. We have two of the top guys at 147 pounds. Not to take anything away from Spence – he is a helluva fighter – it's just we've only seen one aspect of his game because it's worked perfectly. It's just with Crawford, we've seen him do a number of things to change the outcome of his fights. I just feel in this fight, you're going to have to be more versatile and make a lot of adjustments for whoever comes out victorious.

"I don't think nobody could flat-out say how it's going to go. I feel in the early rounds, Terence Crawford is going to have to do some real damage, because Errol is going to get stronger late in the fight. That's where Crawford is going to have to be in great condition, because that's where most of his problems are going to come. I just want to see a good fight; I just want to see two guys in their prime go out there and give the fans a helluva fight. I'm going with Crawford on points. I think Errol has too much pride to let someone stop him."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

## TIM BRADLEY

WBO TITLEHOLDER (2012-2014, 2015-2016)

"It's a remarkable fight, it really is. It's one of the most highly anticipated matchups in boxing. You're pitting two of the best pound-for-pound fighters in boxing today.

"I love these types of fights, where you're not sure who's going to win the fight. You can make a case for both guys on how they can win the fight, but it all boils down to whoever executes the game plan on that night. I think the winner will cement their place in history and without a doubt be one of, if not the greatest fighter of this generation – it's that big. You get the first undisputed welterweight champion in the four-belt era, a new Ring Magazine champion – because I believe that bad boy is up for grabs – which is fantastic.

"There's a lot of layers, as far as what each guy brings into the ring. You've got Spence with elite boxing skills; you've got Crawford with exceptional boxing skills, ring I.Q. and that punching power. Crawford has been on a streak of knockouts for the last five or six years. That's unreal. I think this fight promises to be a test for both these fighter's abilities and [will] really show the highest level of boxing at its finest.

"Although Crawford is considered a switch-hitter, he predominantly fights his fights out of a southpaw stance, whereas Spence is the naturally bigger southpaw. You have Crawford, who's a typically slow starter, and Spence, who's typically a fast starter. Spence knows his strengths and he knows how to approach all his opponents he's faced, but we have yet to see if he can do that against someone as savvy as Crawford. As far as basics, Spence is a textbook technical fighter who doesn't have a whole lot of special effects, but what he does inside the ring, he does extremely well and at a very high level, and he knows how to impose his will on opponents.

"It's a pick 'em fight. I flip-flop back and forth every day. One punch can literally end the night for either guy. If you have someone in the ring who can do multiple things, he can switch the game plan up. Crawford can go southpaw, he can be a counterpuncher, he can come forward and he's mean and he can punch. How do you go against that? And then you have Spence, he's a straight-up terminator! He will not be deterred. Can Crawford crack that code?

"I'm picking Crawford. I think that Crawford has more tools in the tool bag. He's undefeated, but he's been stopping every single guy he's been in the ring with. No one stops Shawn Porter, no one. Not even Spence was able to stop Porter. That tells me Crawford is on a different level. I think Spence is going to give Crawford plenty of opportunities to counter with something hard, and I think Crawford is going to take Spence to a place he's never been before inside the ring. I'm going Crawford wins a 12-round decision, but I do think he hurts and probably drops Errol Spence."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

RYAN HAFEY

## DANNY GARCIA

WBC TITLEHOLDER (2016-2017)

"I think it's the fight the fans want to see. I think it's a great fight. I think it's a 50/50 fight. Whoever wants it more is going to take it.

"On paper, Spence has all the advantages: He's younger, he's the bigger guy, he's been at welterweight his whole career. He can throw 75 punches a round. One fight he threw 1,200 punches, so he's a workhorse. He can break Crawford down if he takes that approach. Use his jab, back him up the whole fight, use his physical strength and youth on him – I think that's his key to victory.

"Crawford is the more versatile fighter; he can fight right-handed, left-handed. He throws his punches very short. For him, it's all about starting out on the right foot. He doesn't want to start late. If he dictates the pace from the opening bell, controls the fight and catches Spence coming in and outboxes Spence, he can probably win a decision.

"It depends who starts on the right foot. If Crawford starts late and Spence puts the pressure on him and tries to break him down, it's going to be hard for Crawford to come back and try to knock Spence out like he usually does. In a few of his fights, he starts really late and breaks his opponent down and comes back late and stops him. But I think if he takes that approach in this fight, he'll lose a decision because Spence keeps getting stronger and stronger as the rounds go on.

"My official pick is that Spence is going to win a close decision, but there's going to be a lot of change of momentum in the fight. I can really see the fight going both ways."

PREDICTION: **SPENCE**

## JEFF HORN

WBO TITLEHOLDER (2017-2018)

"It's an interesting one, that's for sure. Both guys are undefeated and someone's going to lose that. Spence is a pretty good power-puncher; I think he definitely has a power advantage over Crawford and probably a little bit of size and strength. I think Crawford's got ring smarts and better overall boxing ability than Spence.

"I don't think either of them will be throwing too many crazy punches at the start, unless one of them ends up tagging one of the other early. It'll be a boxing fight, and I think Spence will soon realize Crawford is harder to hit than he [thought], and then he'll start rushing in trying to land big shots, and I think Crawford will end up countering him when he tries to do that.

"It's hard to say. I know Spence is a tough guy. It's really hard when they're two completely different types of fighters. I think the only way Spence wins the fight is if he can stop Crawford, but I can see Crawford stopping him too. It's one that's very interesting for me, seeing as I fought one of them. I don't know Errol Spence, but I know Crawford because I fought him. And what I know is Crawford is a very good fighter, and he'll most likely get the victory based on boxing ability."

PREDICTION: **CRAWFORD**

## TOTALS

CRAWFORD: **10**
SPENCE: **5**
DRAW: **1**
NO PICK: **2**

AMANDA WESTCOTT

**(Above) Spence and Crawford came face to face at a fight card in Oklahoma in 2018.**

# THE LONG ROAD TO PRIME TIME

## BOXING POLITICS, MISFORTUNE AND EGOS PREVENTED THE TWO BEST WELTERWEIGHTS FROM SHARING THE RING UNTIL THE FIGHTERS – NOW VETERANS – TOOK CONTROL OF NEGOTIATIONS

**By Ron Borges**

**The road to the T-Mobile Arena** on the Las Vegas Strip has been a long one for Errol Spence, Terence Crawford and their supporters. It has been one filled with twists, turns, deceits and diversions but never defeat for either man, which is why interest in what will happen there on July 29 remains high. On that night, they finally face each other, unburdened by the detritus of financial infighting, bloviating promoters and desperate-to-be-recognized hangers-on.

At long last, it's down to the fighters' wits, their wills and their skills to settle matters between them. Social media taunts, press conference posing and the endless debate over which man was doing the most to avoid the other will be behind them, while in front of them will stand the one thing – the ONLY thing, really – that fight fans have for so long craved to see. The two of them inside a boxing ring deciding in the only place that matters who is the better fighter.

In the weeks leading up to their (too) long-awaited showdown, there will be much talk from all sides about respect and, of course, disrespect. There will be glowering images of each with accompanying promises of knockouts and sad endings for whichever of the two is not doing the speaking at the moment. There will be taglined marketing strategies to garner pay-per-view sales, but for once we have an event that needs no more hype than this: It's a face-to-face showdown between the two best welterweights and maybe even best pound-for-pound fighters of the

present day.

"I think this fight sells itself," insists Crawford. "I don't think that me and Errol got to go out and do things that are not in our character just to sell the fight.

"When you look at the fight, you say, 'OK, you've got two undefeated top five pound-for-pound fighters in their prime going head-to-head for the undisputed welterweight championship of the world. Two action-packed fighters. What more do we need?

"You don't need me going out there acting all crazy. You don't need him going out there acting all crazy either just to sell the fight. The fight is going to sell itself because everybody knows what they're getting, come fight night."

But why'd it take five years to make, and how did each of them get here?

One could simply say "the long way" and leave it at that, but the time has finally come – despite the best efforts of their promoters, their television partners and the alphabet soup of sanctioning organizations that run (and do all they can to ruin) the sport – to ferret out how two hardscrabble kids from Dallas and Omaha fought their way to the biggest non-heavyweight fight in years.

Long before the fight was finally agreed to after a half dozen fits and starts, there were comparisons made to some of the biggest welterweight showdowns in history. To a degree, those comparisons still apply, because there is little debate that anyone but Spence and Crawford belongs in the discussion about who the two best 147-pounders in the world are today.

That is why all of boxing rejoiced when the two fighters themselves decided it was time to stop all the noise and make a deal. Just as they will on July 29, they settled things face-to-face. Well, at least in the age of social media and Zoom calls they did.

"It's been a grueling negotiation, but we finally got it done," said Spence, referencing a March phone discussion between he and Crawford that went a long way toward removing the final roadblock – Crawford's demand that he have a say in how promotional and fight expenses were to be spent. It was a legitimate request, considering he was relying on the lesser end of the net revenue split with no guaranteed minimum for the bulk of his payday. Those concerns nearly deep-sixed the fight, holding it up long enough that Crawford took an interim fight in December to stay busy. Then he and Spence finally decided enough was enough and forced their representatives to get an agreement signed.

"It feels great," Spence admitted. "I had to sit out [over a] year. People have been wanting this fight to happen for five, six years. It's finally happening. It feels great just to get through these tough obstacles and all of the demands he wanted.

"We had to get on the phone and talk about it, and now it's finally happening. This is going to prove not only who the best welterweight is, but who the best fighter in the world is. My mentality is to go all out and give everything. His mentality is the same. This can't be anything but a great fight. Terence is a great fighter, but I'm going to break another great fighter's will. Mentally and physically, I'm going to dominate and come out on top."

It's hard to comprehend why there have been so many stumbling blocks, but boxing runs like no other sport. In truth, Crawford's demand for transparency made perfect sense and should have been readily agreed to, which is of course why it became a problem. Common sense seems very uncommon on the business side of boxing.

That Crawford and Spence finally stopped letting the people around them argue and talked to each other directly is to their credit. Why it took them five years to understand it would be necessary is another matter.

For several years, the issue really had nothing to do with the fighters themselves – a common situation in fights that should be made but aren't. Until the fighters took control, as Spence and Crawford finally did to a degree, it was a battle of words and legalese between Spence's promoter and for all intents and purposes manager, Al Haymon, and Bob Arum, who until recently promoted Crawford. In a nutshell, the problem was that both sides wanted more than the projected pay-per-view value of the event. Math is not always easy for two prideful sides to understand.

In addition, there were the usual conflicts over dueling television entanglements and a general feeling on both sides that the risk of losing exceeded the reward of fighting. After Crawford finally jettisoned Arum and became a promotional free agent able to sign a two-fight deal with PBC, Haymon's promotional company, the negotiations became easier, although Crawford's demand to monitor expenses threw a monkey wrench into the deal for a few months.

From a fistic standpoint, the long delay has potentially placed both fighters past their primes, regardless of what the suits and publicists will claim as the promotion unfolds.

Spence is now 33 and has experienced long layoffs and a near-fatal car crash in the past few years. The accident, in which he was ejected from his cartwheeling Ferrari after losing control at an estimated 100 mph, came less than a month after he'd won a split decision over two-time welterweight titleholder Shawn Porter in October 2019.

Although he spent six days in intensive care, Spence miraculously suffered no major injuries, but it would be more than a year before he returned to the ring on December 5, 2020, and won a unanimous decision over Danny Garcia. Then, while sparring in preparation for what would have been the biggest fight of his life against Manny Pacquaio, Spence suffered a detached retina that forced the fight to be canceled. It

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**Crawford, a former lightweight and 140-pound champ, won the WBO welterweight title in 2018.**

JAYNE KAMIN-OCNEA

**Spence has overcome a devastating car wreck, a torn retina and long stretches of inactivity.**

resulted in a 16-month layoff before he returned to the ring, stopping Yordenis Ugas on April 16, 2022.

He has not fought since, choosing to sit out rather than move up to junior middleweight as some had speculated he might if he could not quickly come to terms with Crawford. Those negotiations took longer than expected, but Spence was steadfast. If he carries that tenacity into the actual fight, it will be a war.

The long wait has almost certainly taken a toll, though. While Crawford claims he "stayed true to himself" throughout the protracted contractual fight, Spence has claimed he made considerable concessions to make the deal happen. Whatever the truth, it defies logic to argue that a 33-year-old man who has suffered a detached retina, a near-death experience and three lengthy absences from the ring is "still in his prime."

As for Crawford, although the storyline is different, the bottom line is the same. A 35-year-old fighter with 39 professional fights, including 17 world title fights, may no longer be at his peak. That is not to say he is not still a great fighter, and the same is true for Spence, but the idea that this is a replay of Leonard-Hearns, Leonard-Duran, De La Hoya-Trinidad or even Whitaker-Chavez is nonsense.

Sugar Ray Leonard was 24 when he faced a 29-year-old Duran in their first fight. He was 25 and Hearns a mere 22 when they faced off for the first time. De La Hoya and Trinidad were both 26 when they fought each other in 1999, and Pernell Whitaker was only 29 and Julio Cesar Chavez 31 when they battled to a controversial draw in San Antonio.

In a sport as brutal as boxing, the calendar matters. It is undefeated because the years take a toll that cannot be ignored. This is not to say Spence-Crawford doesn't have the ingredients to be a great fight, nor has it come so late that it feels like we'll get a repeat of Mayweather-Pacquiao, a lackluster fight that came when both were far beyond their prime, Mayweather being a fading 38 and Pacquiao an equally reduced fighter at 36.

Still, it never should have taken this long to make this fight, because it has been the logical landing point for both men for quite some time. Spence has always been the bigger man, having fought in the 152-pound division in the 2012 Olympics before turning pro at 147. Crawford has marched to world titles at 135, 140 and now 147. He required some time for growth, both physical and in terms of his popularity, to be sure. But a five-year gestation period was a bit much.

Despite the long wait, both fighters believe their meeting will be a legacy-defining fight, Crawford telling TMZ Sports it will be "the biggest fight in the last 10-plus years." It might well be, and certainly there is no doubt it will be viewed as the toughest opponent either has faced.

During a press conference in Beverly Hills in June, Spence said, "You ain't fought nobody" to Crawford. "Even Shawn Porter said he didn't train like he should against you. Kell Brook was already broken. I broke Kell Brook's other eye (three years before Crawford stopped him); that's how he got broke."

Crawford seemed a bit taken aback by that comment, considering he disposed of both Porter and Brook more easily than Spence had, stopping Porter in the 10th round and Brook in four, sending the former into retirement, while Spence won a very close split decision over Porter and needed 11 rounds to dispatch with Brook.

Regardless of resumes, Crawford insists, "I'm at the best I can be mentally, and I feel nobody can beat me when I'm at the top of my game. I'll show each and every one of you why this is the Terence Crawford era.

"Everything is [relying] on this one victory for me to say, 'I told you so.' I know a lot of people pick Spence. They're wrong. I know a lot of people say I'm too small. They're wrong."

The issue of size has been somewhat overblown. Although Spence is the naturally bigger man, having spent his entire career at welterweight and could likely weigh as much as 160 pounds by the night of the fight, it is Crawford who will hold a two-inch reach advantage. The latter is also widely considered to be the more powerful puncher, as his 30 knockouts in 39 fights would seem to make clear.

Spence is equally confident both that the fight will become a belated classic and that it will cement his place atop today's fistic landscape, not because of a size difference but because of a more important difference between them.

"If you know his mentality and my mentality, you know we're going for the victory," Spence said. "He's going to be tough to break, and I'm not breaking. As the rounds go on, I'm going to try to break his will. That's what I do. I break people down. I feel like I have the better fundamentals – jab, hook, whatever. I do everything right. I just feel I'm the better fighter overall.

"This is a legacy fight for me. This is Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns. This is De La Hoya-Trinidad. Everyone says the Floyd and Pacquiao fight was huge, but they were a lot older. We're in our prime. This fight will be talked about for decades, because the winner is the best fighter in the world."

Crawford has fought his way from obscurity in Omaha, Nebraska, which is a boxing wasteland, to a 39-0 record and a chance to become the first man to be an undisputed champion in two different weight classes since the dawn of the four-belt era. Spence, meanwhile, has gotten to 28-0 by virtue of slick movement, body-punching, overcoming significant health issues and with a kind of grinding attack that wears opponents down until they implode. In his mind, that is how this fight will go – which is to say, not unlike the way the negotiations went to make it happen in the first place.

Tim Bradley's brutal and dramatic 12-round war with then-unheralded Ruslan Provodnikov was The Ring's 2013 Fight of the Year.

# THE 10 GREATEST WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP BOUTS

**THE TOUGHEST, MOST TALENTED BOXERS IN HISTORY CLASHED AT WELTERWEIGHT, CREATING LEGENDARY FIGHTS THAT MADE THE 147-POUND CLASS ONE OF BOXING'S GLAMOR DIVISIONS**

**By Lee Groves**

**After years of speculation, rumors and rhetoric – and following** a protracted negotiation that seemed more complex than the eventual nuclear arms treaty between the U.S. and the old Soviet Union – this era's definitive welterweight championship showdown was finally confirmed: Errol Spence versus Terence Crawford on July 29 at Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena for all four widely recognized sanctioning body titles as well as for the Ring Magazine belt emblematic of divisional supremacy.

While it would've been ideal for this match to happen several years earlier when both were in their respective primes – and before they experienced the ravages of injury or inactivity – the contrasts in styles, skills and temperaments remain. Both are undefeated, both are in the top tiers of credible pound-for-pound lists, and, if the deal's terms are fulfilled, not only will the world see a rematch before the end of 2023, it could witness a trilogy if the first two produce different victors.

It's the most anticipated welterweight title fight since Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao in 2015, another pairing that, in a perfect world, should've taken place years before it did. Will Spence-Crawford leave the same "chunky milk" aftertaste that has soured all Mayweather-Pacquiao memories, or will it add a worthy new chapter to the welterweight division's magnificent championship tradition?

Speaking of tradition, the following article lists – in chronological order – 10 of the best 147-pound championship fights ever staged. Each fight epitomizes the fusion of speed, power and athleticism that has long defined the division, and each match clarified how the winners – and losers – would be remembered. Fittingly, five Ring Fights of the Year are included while the other five would've been worthy winners in their respective years. So, without further delay, let's begin this journey back in fistic history:

Barney Ross is nailed with a left from Jimmy McLarnin.

**May 28, 1934 – Barney Ross SD 15 Jimmy McLarnin I:**
The official scores of 13-1-1 and 11-2-2 for Ross and 9-1-5 for McLarnin might be misleading, because, according to the New York Times' reporter (who scored it 8-7 for Ross), the first meeting between reigning divisional monarchs in 13 years produced 15 rounds of sizzling action. The 26-year-old McLarnin was making the first defense of the title he won from Young Corbett III by first-round TKO 364 days earlier, while the 24-year-old Ross was the reigning 140-pound king who had also once ruled at lightweight. Following a careful first two rounds, Ross' aggression in rounds 3-8 allowed him to seize control. But McLarnin's power surfaced in the ninth when a solid hook scored the fight's only knockdown, something that had never happened to Ross in his other 57 professional fights. Ross instantly arose, then stemmed an inspired late McLarnin rally by winning the final round – and The Ring's 1934 Fight of the Year. With the loss, McLarnin became the eighth consecutive welterweight champion to lose the crown in his first defense, a streak that stretched to 10 when Ross lost to McLarnin in the rematch less than four months later and McLarnin lost to Ross in the May 1935 rubber match. Ross – only the third ever to win titles in three weight classes (Bob Fitzsimmons and Tony Canzoneri were the others) – snapped the jinx in November 1935 by outpointing Izzy Jannazzo over 15 rounds.

**November 30, 1955 – Carmen Basilio KO 12 Tony DeMarco II:**
Just 173 days after Basilio won the title from DeMarco at the 1:52 mark of round 12 before his home fans at Syracuse's War Memorial Auditorium, the gritty "Onion Farmer" trekked to DeMarco's native Boston to risk his newly won championship. Although the first fight was described as a classic, the sequel was even better as the converted southpaws swapped hooks, crosses and uppercuts before a charged-up, pro-DeMarco Boston Garden crowd. Despite suffering a cut over the left eye early in round 2, the 23-year-old DeMarco built a huge mathematical lead by keeping Basilio, 28, on the back foot and landing the sharper, harder punches. DeMarco's trademark hooks stunned Basilio in rounds 4 and 5 and another with 30 seconds left in the seventh numbed the champ's right leg to the point that only his immense courage kept him upright. Through eight, DeMarco was ahead 69-64, 68-57 and 69-63, but, just like the first meeting, Basilio's stamina proved decisive. Basilio's crisp punches at short range depleted DeMarco's reserves and quieted the previously raucous throng. A series of rights scored the first knockdown in the 12th, and a follow-up volley of crosses left DeMarco flat on his face. The end came at the 1:54 mark of round 12 – just two seconds longer than the original. Basilio-DeMarco II was named The Ring's 1955 Fight of the Year, the first of an unmatched five straight FOTY honors involving the Canastota native.

**September 12, 1956 – Carmen Basilio KO 9 Johnny Saxton II:**
Saxton's successes were inextricably tied to the underworld, and many believed his title-winning efforts against Kid Gavilan in October 1954 and Basilio in March 1956 were heavily influenced by that world. Because Basilio spent his career fighting criminal influences in boxing, this rematch victory over the 26-year-old Saxton before his fans in Syracuse had to have been one of his most satisfying. Saxton, who used his faster hands and livelier legs to great effect in March, curiously opted to trade with the rugged 29-year-old ex-champ, and the result was a high-intensity brawl for the first five rounds. A strong right stunned Saxton late in round 3, and a violent volley negated what had been an effective Saxton fourth. Basilio's slashing blows gashed Saxton's upper lip in the seventh, and the challenger smartly worked over the injury with jabs and hooks in the eighth. Basilio closed the curtain on The Ring's 1956 Fight of the Year with an overhand right that stunned Saxton, then a flurry capped by a piercing right to the ribs and a compact left uppercut to the chin that prompted referee Al Berl to save the nearly helpless Saxton. Weeping tears of joy, Basilio called this win "the biggest thrill of my life" in the post-fight interview.

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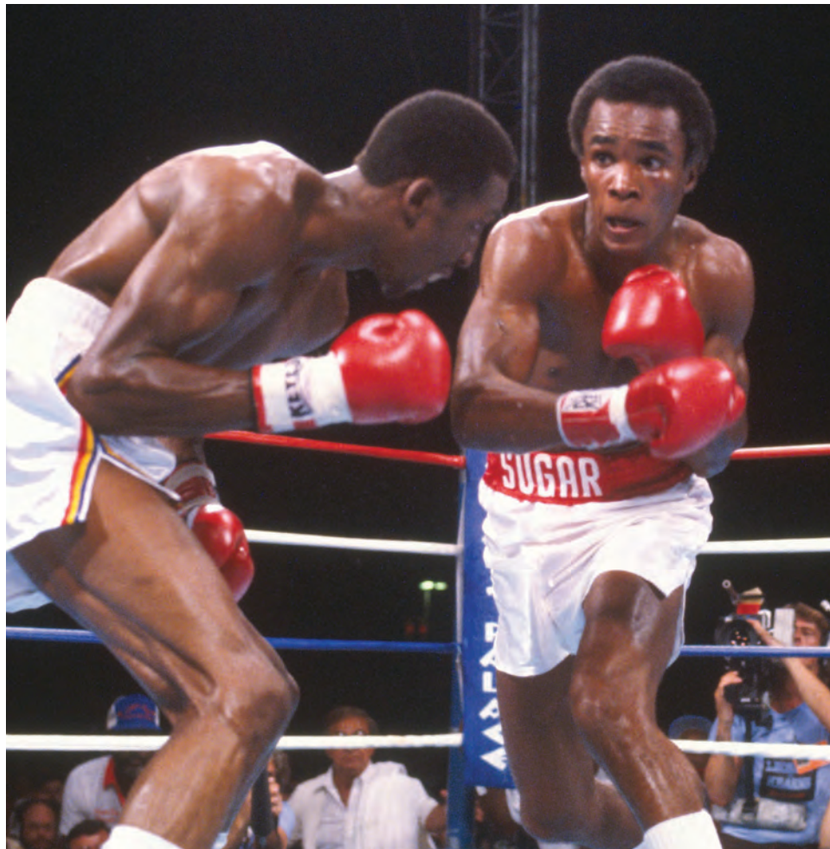
**June 20, 1980 – Roberto Duran UD 15 Sugar Ray Leonard I:**
"The Brawl in Montreal" was the first megamatch of the 1980s because it paired Duran, arguably the greatest fighter of the 1970s, with Leonard, the logical successor to Muhammad Ali as "the face of boxing," thanks to his gold medal-winning performance in the 1976 Montreal Olympics, his sparkling all-American persona and the sublime skills that had built his 27-0 (18 KOs) record. Duran, 72-1 (56 KOs) going into the fight, deeply resented Leonard's elevated standing, and thanks to a masterful psychological campaign he not only won over the Montreal crowd, he also drove Leonard into such a rage that one of history's smartest operators opted to brawl with the master brawler. The result was a legendary slugfest that saw the 29-year-old Duran at his animalistic zenith while Leonard, 24, manfully extinguished the "creature of television" label that had dogged him for years. Despite being staggered in the second and manhandled for much of the contest, it was Leonard who produced the stronger finish, a finish that closed the final gaps to 148-147, 146-144 and 145-144. It wasn't named Fight of the Year – Matthew Saad Muhammad-Yaqui Lopez II won that honor – but Duran-Leonard I was not just a fight for its time, it was a fight for all time.

FOCUS ON SPORT

**September 16, 1981 – Sugar Ray Leonard KO 14 Thomas Hearns I:**
In terms of timing, build-up and fight-night execution, Leonard-Hearns I, The Ring's 1981 Fight of the Year, remains the gold standard by which all other superfights are measured. At just 22, Hearns was already considered one of the most terrifying knockout artists in division history, thanks to his 32-0 (30 KOs) record, which included a shattering two-round KO over Pipino Cuevas to win the WBA title in August 1980, and the combination of his physical dimensions (6 feet 1 inches, 78-inch wingspan) and a cold-eyed stare worthy of his "Hit Man" nickname. Meanwhile, 25-year-old Ring/WBC champ Leonard (30-1, 21 KOs) restored any lost luster from the Duran loss by making the Panamanian beast quit in the rematch, and in his most recent fight he added the Ring and WBA 154-pound titles by stopping the previously undefeated Ayub Kalule. The fight itself exceeded even the loftiest expectations as Leonard, the boxer, turned tiger in rounds 6 and 7, prompting Hearns, the slugger, to turn boxer in rounds 8-12. Hearns' expert jabbing not only helped him build a substantial lead through 12 rounds (116-112, 117-112, 117-111), it also produced a swelling that threatened to close Leonard's left eye. Told by Angelo Dundee "you're blowin' it, son, you're blowin' it," Leonard "brought it up from the gut" by flooring Hearns in the 13th and stopping him in the 14th to become the new undisputed champion.

**April 23, 1988 – Simon Brown KO 14 Tyrone Trice I:**
This bout for the IBF title vacated by Lloyd Honeyghan was one of the final 15-round title fights ever staged, and the two combatants




Leonard-Hearns I is a classic that all big welterweight showdowns since have been compared to.

needed just about every second to identify the better fighter. This was a match defined by its sustained action as well as its shifts of momentum. The 24-year-old Trice (28-1, 23 KOs going in) floored Brown (24-1, 18 KOs) with a monstrous hook-overhand right in round 2, prompting Brown to turn boxer in rounds 3-5. The tide turned sharply in the sixth as Brown, 24, hammered the tiring Trice, and in the seventh he wobbled the Milwaukee native with a huge right uppercut. Instead of folding, Trice found his second wind, resulting in a ninth round that produced spectacular trench warfare. Brown lost a point for hitting after the 10th round bell, and Trice won the 11th with skillful boxing. A strong right-left hurt Brown in the 12th, but "Mantequilla" exacted revenge by scoring three knockdowns in the round's final 45 seconds. Trice somehow survived the 13th and managed to stun Brown in the 14th, but the Jamaican answered with a short right to the jaw that left Trice face-first on the floor. During that fall, his head clashed with Brown's and created a gash over Brown's left eye. Trice regained his feet at five, but a sickening, neck-wrenching hook prompted referee Steve Smoger to intervene at the 2:29 mark.

**September 17, 1994 – Felix Trinidad KO 4 Luis Ramon "Yory Boy" Campas:**

At 56-0 (50 KOs), the 23-year-old Campas, according to his manager, had to sue in order to get a crack at IBF champion Trinidad, who, at just 21, was already 23-0 (19 KOs) and making his fourth defense. Still, the bettors saw this as a pick-'em fight and Campas backed up his "danger man" reputation by flooring "Tito" with an extraordinarily short hook in round 2. Instead of running, Trinidad eagerly traded bombs with the power-punching Mexican, but he resorted to low blows after tasting a Campas combination in the third and a savage right uppercut moments later, the latter of which resulted in a point penalty. Angered by the referee's sanction, Trinidad plowed inside and connected with blistering combinations for the rest of the round. Trinidad continued his explosive assault in the fourth, but Campas unflinchingly absorbed the blows, then answered with rippling body shots. Following a tremendous toe-to-toe exchange, Trinidad ended matters with a breathtaking 23-punch assault capped by a frighteningly flush hook that threatened to break Campas' neck. Referee Richard Steele immediately – and correctly – intervened at the 2:41 mark, ending a performance that stamped Trinidad as a superstar for the 1990s, and eventually a Hall of Fame inductee.

**Trinidad's violent up-from-the-canvas stoppage of Campas helped make him a star.**

**June 17, 2000 – Shane Mosley SD 12 Oscar De La Hoya I:**

Of all the 147-pound title fights staged since Leonard-Hearns I, Mosley-De La Hoya came closest to fulfilling that fight's prime-versus-prime dynamic in the ring and out. Like Leonard, the 27-year-old De La Hoya (32-1, 26 KOs) was a charismatic gold medalist, a four-division titlist and the biggest moneymaker among the lighter weights, and while the 28-year-old Mosley (34-0, 32 KOs) was far stockier than the mantis-like Hearns, he was an energetic "power boxer" eager to use his opponent's star power to break into the elite class. He had already made his mark at lightweight as he racked up eight IBF defenses – all by stoppage – and many questioned the wisdom of "Sugar Shane" skipping over 140 to launch an assault against the world's best welterweight. In the end, Mosley's decision was justified as the pair showcased high-end skills and launched supersonic shots for 12 scintillating rounds. Mosley turned the match in the ninth as he got the better of the high-speed exchanges, and he finished the fight by out-landing "The Golden Boy" in each of the final five rounds (including 45-18 in the 12th) to nail down the split decision (116-112, 115-113 Mosley, 115-113 De La Hoya).

**April 2, 2005 – Luis Collazo SD 12 Jose Antonio Rivera:**

Collazo-Rivera is hardly the first fight that springs to mind when terrific welterweight title bouts are discussed, but this battle on the Jean-Marc Mormeck-Wayne Braithwaite undercard qualifies as a "Closet Classic." The 31-year-old Rivera, a Worcester-based Philadelphian with a 37-3-1 (24 KOs) mark, was making the first defense of the WBA's secondary belt he won by majority decision in Germany against German Michel Trabant, while the 23-year-old southpaw Collazo (24-1, 11 KOs) sought to play spoiler. After splitting the first two rounds, the already-frenetic pace accelerated in the third as they swapped hard blows along the ropes. Rivera was the aggressor throughout and enjoyed the edge in the trenches while Collazo's quicker hands and crisper combinations dominated at long range. A brilliant exchange along the ropes ended the sixth, and the intensity only grew from there. The final round provided a punishing and soaring crescendo, but in the end, Collazo won 115-113 on two cards because he was a little quicker, a little sharper, and landed enough hard shots down the stretch to counteract the determined pursuit of Rivera, who earned his own 115-113 score.

**March 16, 2013 – Timothy Bradley UD 12 Ruslan Provodnikov:**

Bradley's strongest case for his induction into the IBHOF can be found in his back-to-back WBO title defenses against Ruslan Provodnikov – The Ring's 2013 Fight of the Year – and Juan Manuel Marquez. The 29-year-old Bradley (29-0, 12 KOs) had much to prove following his hotly disputed split decision win against Manny Pacquiao, and he did so by going toe-to-toe with the rugged 29-year-old Russian (22-1, 15 KOs), who staggered "Desert Storm" numerous times and forced him to take a knee in the final round. Between the inspired slugging, Bradley's skills opened cuts under and over Provodnikov's left eye, but it was his grit and self-belief that pulled Bradley through. Still, Bradley paid a steep physical price – a concussion that caused slurred speech, poor gait and failing memory – and it took months for him to recover. But he recovered enough to defeat Marquez and finish his career at 33-2-1 (13 KOs).

**Collazo's hard-fought split nod over Rivera is an underrated slugfest.**

These are but 10 of the best 147-pound title fights ever held; other worthy candidates include Sugar Ray Leonard-Wilfred Benitez, Simon Brown-Maurice Blocker, Aaron Davis-Mark Breland, Milton McCrory-Colin Jones I and II, Oscar de la Hoya-Ike Quartey, Sugar Ray Robinson-Kid Gavilan II, Sugar Ray Robinson-Tommy Bell II – among others. The list could go on and on. But if Spence-Crawford is good enough to even get on the outskirts of this list, "Bud" and "The Truth" will have done themselves proud. RING

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*Lee Groves is a full member of the BWAA, from which he has won 22 writing awards since 2006. The 2022 winner of the BWAA's Marvin Kohn "Good Guy Award" has been an elector for the International Boxing Hall of Fame since 2001 and is also a writer, researcher and punch-counter for CompuBox, Inc. as well as a panelist on "In This Corner: The Podcast" on FITE.TV. He is the author of "Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics" (available on Amazon) and the co-author of "Muhammad Ali: By the Numbers" (also available on Amazon). To contact Groves, use the email l.groves@frontier.com or send him a message via Facebook and Twitter (@leegrovesboxing).*

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THE RING MAGAZINE

LEONARD-HEARNS: FOCUS ON SPORT; RYAN HAFEY/PREMIER BOXING CHAMPIONS

# WORTH THE WAIT

## IT'S TAKEN YEARS FOR THE **SPENCE-CRAWFORD** SHOWDOWN TO HAPPEN, BUT DELAYED SUPERBOUTS ARE NOTHING NEW IN BOXING

**by Don Stradley**

**Leonard-Hearns I did not happen right away, but it delivered.**

**If you've been irritated by the** long stretch of time spent waiting for Errol Spence and Terence Crawford to get together, you aren't alone. This year's "big fight" fell apart more than once on the way to its forthcoming July date, and some in the business – not just the customers but actual card-carrying members of the so-called fight fraternity – have already sniffed with disdain about these two fighters, saying they should've fought years ago.

Well, maybe that's true. But whether it was COVID-19 putting a damper on everything for a year or Spence enduring a car accident and then an eye injury, there always seemed to be something preventing this contest from taking place.

However, if the more impatient segment of fandom thinks Spence and Crawford have somehow wronged them, they should relax. Boxing politics being what they are in 2023, the oceans one must navigate in order to make a fight happen are not exactly smooth. Besides, this certainly isn't the first time a pair of fighters took their time before agreeing to punch each other in the head for our amusement.

It was immediately after Sugar Ray Leonard had won the Ring and WBC welterweight titles from Wilfred Benitez in November 1979 when sportswriters began mentioning Thomas Hearns as a

BETTMAN

possible opponent for him. Hearns was undefeated and had soundly beaten journeyman Mike Colbert on the same night that Leonard won the title. Yet Angelo Dundee, Leonard's cagy trainer and mentor, quickly put the brakes on any conversation concerning Hearns. Dundee had guided Leonard since the start of his professional career and knew a thing or two about the business. Dundee said something to the effect of, "Not right now. Let's wait and let it get juicy."

In other words, if the fight meant anything, it would still be meaningful a year or two in the future. Dundee knew a salient truth: Hearns wasn't yet a household name.

**Gerry Cooney (right) took his time before challenging heavyweight champ Larry Holmes.**

Of course, boxing fans had been thinking about a Leonard-Hearns showdown prior to this, since both were young and dynamic welterweights. Then, as now, hardcore fans were always beating the drums for a fight long before it was realistically feasible, and long before casual fans gave a fig about it. In the meantime, Dundee had to hear the usual rubbish about how he and Leonard were frightened of Hearns and how Leonard was strictly a creation of the ABC-TV network. Fortunately, Dundee was a cool old head and kept a fight with Hearns percolating until it really meant something.

By the time Leonard and Hearns finally fought in September of 1981, it was one of the most lucrative contests of all time, an unprecedented blockbuster for a bout so far below the heavyweight class. Leonard won by TKO in the 14th. Dundee had been right to wait a bit. Big fights need a chance to simmer.

When Larry Holmes and Gerry Cooney stepped into a Las Vegas ring in the summer of 1982, it was the culmination of a nearly three-year gestation period. Cooney was an enormously popular Irish-American fighter from New York. A likable giant with a bone-crunching left hook and a charming smile, Cooney seemed to have been created out of the fantasies of old-time fight fans. As early as 1979, he was being mentioned as the next big star in the business, and Holmes was ready to fight him. But Cooney's career had an erratic quality, largely because of personal problems that weren't quite revealed until years later.

All we saw as we waited for Cooney to challenge Holmes for the heavyweight title was one delay after another. There were mysterious injuries and managerial issues and the pesky feeling that Cooney was stalling. Fans speculated that he was secretly scared of Holmes, too inexperienced or just plain not ready. He'd schedule tune-ups and then cancel them. By the time the fight happened, a bit of the luster had worn off. Yet Holmes-Cooney was a major moneymaker and, in the end, a competitive and entertaining fight. Holmes was too much of a sharpshooter for Cooney and stopped him at 2:52 of the 13th round.

Along with people casting their doubts about Cooney, the many delays brought out the racial components of the fight. Holmes often complained that the attention paid to Cooney was all due to his whiteness, which was partly true but not entirely. By fight night, extra security was set up around the arena in the advent of a race riot. Fortunately, nothing like that transpired, and Holmes and Cooney actually became friendly in the years after the bout. The bout's racial elements, however, were nothing compared to a contest that took place on July 4, 1910, between Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries, another bout that took forever to materialize.

Johnson was being mentioned as a possible challenger for Jeffries'

**Jeffries un-retired after a year-and-a-half of public pressure to challenge Johnson (right).**

PA IMAGES / CONTRIBUTOR

heavyweight title as far back as 1903, but big Jeff drew the "color line" and refused to defend the championship against Johnson or any other black contender. Jeffries retired, and Johnson was kept in limbo while Canada's Tommy Burns claimed the title. But once Johnson yanked the laurels away from Burns in 1908, the public began clamoring for Jeffries to return from his retirement and bring the title back to the white race. There'd been well-liked black champions in the lighter divisions, but apparently having a black heavyweight champion was more than white supremacists could stand. Jeffries balked at first but eventually came back to face Johnson on a scalding hot afternoon in Reno. But the fight that had been talked about for seven or so years turned out to be a dull and one-sided anti-climax, with Johnson stopping Jeffries in the 15th.

Had Johnson-Jeffries been worth the wait? Not for those rooting for the white favorite. It may not have been worth it for Johnson, either, since he would only hear that he'd beaten a washed-up old guy who had been in retirement for five years. Even promoter Tex Rickard struggled in the bout's aftermath; he'd hoped to make a big score on the fight films, but theaters wouldn't show them for fear of inciting riots. Sometimes these long-awaited fights don't pan out for anybody.

Jumping ahead 80 years, Mike Tyson was nearly Johnson's equal as far as controversy. He also experienced some delays in making important fights happen. He was supposed to meet Evander Holyfield in 1990, but losing the heavyweight championship to Buster Douglas put the kibosh on that idea. Instead, Holyfield stepped in to fight Douglas and won the title. Tyson-Holyfield was eventually made for November of 1991. Unfortunately, a rib injury caused Tyson to request a postponement. This was followed by a rape conviction that landed Tyson in an Indiana prison for three years. While Tyson was getting accustomed to jailhouse cuisine, Holyfield's career just about capsized. He dropped title bout decisions to Riddick Bowe and Michael Moorer and briefly retired because of health issues while Tyson was incarcerated, then lost his rubber match with Bowe shortly after Tyson's release. He looked like a spent fighter even while halting undersized and overmatched Bobby Czyz.

**Holyfield's first shot at Tyson (left) happened five years after its original date.**

CHRIS FARINA/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

By the time Tyson was out of prison and had resumed his status as the top heavyweight in the world, Holyfield was brought to him as a sort of sacrificial lamb, another easy opponent to keep the Tyson cash flow going. At one time, Tyson-Holyfield was as big a fight as could be made in boxing. Now it was such a hard sell that cable providers were offering refunds if the fight lasted less than three rounds. The bout took place in November of 1996, a full five years after it was first canceled. Holyfield came in as a 5-1 underdog and won by 11th-round TKO. No one asked for a refund.

Tyson's bout with Lennox Lewis also took a long time to materialize. A battle between the two had been suggested for years but seemed unlikely to happen when Lewis was KO'd by Hasim Rahman in April 2001. Lewis promptly KO'd Rahman in a return fight, and the wheels were immediately in motion for Lewis-Tyson. Both fighters were past their prime and vulnerable, so there was a sense that it had to happen before one or the other lost again. Moreover, Tyson's behavior had become so strange that it seemed he'd self-destruct before the fight could be made.

Faster than you could say "emotional meltdown," the January 2002 press conference to announce the fight saw Tyson attack Lewis and bite his leg. This resulted in another delay as Nevada refused to grant a license to the unpredictable Tyson. Several other states followed suit. The bout ended up at The Pyramid in Memphis, where Lewis stopped Tyson in eight. Lewis-Tyson set a new record for pay-per-view buys but left fans with a lingering question: Would the result have been different a few years earlier?

That same question haunted the Floyd Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao bout of May 2015, which may forever be the gold standard of delayed bouts. Had poet William Langland known of this bout, he never would've written the oft-quoted line about patience being a virtue. In fact, the most anticipated matchup in years, which Mayweather won by unanimous decision, was a stinker of the highest kind.

The fight was rumored to be signed as far back as 2009, but in the coming years it was delayed by endless disagreements over drug testing and disputes over money. Pacquiao's 2012 losses to Tim Bradley and Juan Manual Marquez threatened to derail a bout with Mayweather once and for all. When the pair finally agreed to meet, the bloom was long gone from the rose, yet the fight was still an unprecedented financial success. But even as previous records for buy rates were toppling like dominos, fans were profoundly disappointed in the fight. Compounding the 12 rounds of tepid action was Pacquiao's post-fight announcement that he'd fought with an injured shoulder. If this proverbial dead horse will allow us one more kick, Mayweather-Pacquiao was definitely not worth the wait.

Middleweight champion Marvelous Marvin Hagler wanted nothing more than a bout with Leonard. But he had to wait. And wait. And wait. Things seemed to

JOHN GURZINSKI

**Mayweather-Pacquiao probably should have happened five years earlier.**

be moving in the right direction in 1982, but Leonard retired, citing a recent eye injury and a loss of enthusiasm for the fight game. Hagler was stunned by the announcement and had to forge his career without Leonard's help.

In 1984, Leonard staged a return that whetted Hagler's appetite all over again. Unfortunately, Leonard looked so rusty in his comeback bout that he swiftly ducked back into retirement. Sensing Hagler was ripe for the plucking, Leonard returned to boxing in April of 1987 and beat Hagler by a close split decision. In a way, the Leonard-Hagler fight had been five years in the making. As in many other cases, the wait certainly helped at the box office, but one always wonders how things might've turned out had they fought in 1982.

What makes Crawford-Spence a bit different from the other bouts mentioned here is that neither fighter is a mainstream star. Of course, this isn't their fault – society changes, and boxing's place in it changes every few decades. Still, we'd be wrong to say this fight is bigger than boxing, which is what most of the other bouts mentioned here had in common.

But if it isn't bigger than boxing, Crawford-Spence is certainly big in its own sweet way. For that reason, we should be glad it was made. Yes, it took a while. And it might've been different a few years ago. But you can't deny that this one is juicy.

RYAN HAFEY

# BATTLE PLAN: ERROL SPENCE JR. VS. TERENCE CRAWFORD

## TWO RESPECTED TRAINERS – **STEPHEN "BREADMAN" EDWARDS** AND **JOSE BENAVIDEZ SR.** – REVEAL HOW THEY WOULD TRAIN CRAWFORD AND SPENCE TO WIN THE UNDISPUTED WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

**By Joseph Santoliquito**

**It's the fight that fans have been** screaming about for years. On Saturday, July 29 at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, they're finally going to get it when IBF/WBA/WBC titlist Errol Spence Jr. (28-0, 22 knockouts) takes on WBO beltholder Terence "Bud" Crawford (39-0, 30 KOs) for the undisputed welterweight championship.

Spence and Crawford, respectively ranked No. 4 and No. 2 pound-for-pound by The Ring, will be looking to make history as the first undisputed welterweight world champion in the four-belt era. As the pair are also ranked No. 1 and No. 2 in the division, the vacant Ring belt will be on the line as well.

The 33-year-old Spence has done far more work at 147 pounds, having spent his 10½-year career at or near the weight, while the 35-year-old Crawford has only been there for his last seven fights and is a former junior welterweight and lightweight champion.

Spence likes to keep opponents at the end of a commanding right jab, back opponents to the ropes and throw either a left uppercut or a right hook. Rinse and repeat. Crawford measures opponents and uses great footwork and solid fundamentals while switching stances to confuse his victims, often starting slow and then cranking up the aggression.

Can he do that against Spence? Which fighter will impose their will? Can Spence keep up with Crawford? How will Spence deal with Crawford's counterpunching?

The Ring sought out the keen insight of two world-renowned trainers – Stephen "Breadman" Edwards, who trains former junior middleweight titlist Julian "J-Rock" Williams, and Jose Benavidez Sr., who guides sons Jose Jr., who fought Crawford in October 2018, and David, The Ring's No. 1-rated super middleweight who in his last fight beat Caleb Plant (who was trained by Edwards).

Here are the battle plans they concocted for each fighter:

### STEPHEN "BREADMAN" EDWARDS, ON HOW HE WOULD TRAIN TERENCE CRAWFORD:

"Without really knowing Crawford's body, I would like an eight- to 10-week training camp. He would usually spar three times a week, up until the last week – Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Then we would taper off the last week of training camp.

"We would start sparring four to six rounds and then build up each week. Maybe about five or six weeks in, we would max out, going around to 12 to 15 rounds, and then we would gradually go back down and taper off in the last weeks of training camp. He'll be ready to go. I would build him up to 10 to 15 rounds, then down to eight and six rounds, and that takes you right into the fight. I don't believe in wasting a fighter in training camp.

"From everything that I hear, Errol is one of the more physically imposing and strongest welterweights that most guys have ever felt. I don't know if I would so much go large with sparring partners, but use physically imposing guys, and I would want Terence to constantly feel that. If I couldn't find any welterweights as strong, I would go to junior middles to impose that physical aspect. I also want three guys and switch them out, bringing in new guys so Terence would not get too used to the sparring. He's going to have to switch during the fight, so we'll work on having him switch during sparring.

"Terence is well-conditioned, and I wouldn't change anything in his conditioning. I'm a firm believer in new-school stuff and the old-school stuff. Guys change their conditioning too much today; it's why guys have shaky conditioning. I also would want him around 160, 162 in camp. I would want him to be strong at a weight he would rehydrate back up to. The week of the fight, he could be around 156, 157, as long as his water intake is high. When he cuts weight, he's cutting into water, not muscle. It's a problem a lot of guys have; they cut their water intake out too early and they cut into their muscle. If he drank over a gallon of water a day, it's easier to cut out the water than cut into muscle.

"I always have a fight plan strategy, but I also have a backup plan that we

can go to in case a guy takes away the original plan. I also believe you fight one round at a time. You can't get to the 12th round unless you get through the first 11. I like to break the fight down into increments. It's not one big 36-minute fight. A guy like Crawford, if you look at him real close, he's collecting data the first three, four rounds of a fight. He's not a super dominant fighter early on. He builds. And with a guy like Errol, I would want him to get his jab going.

"A lot of times Terence switches to southpaw. He does that against orthodox fighters. Errol is a southpaw, and that switch may not have the same effect against a southpaw of Errol's caliber. I would have Terence stay orthodox and collect data the first few rounds and get off the jab.

"I would want Terence to go to the body. Errol is imposing. He's like a snowball that builds up. He'll have to slow down Errol's train early. We would be fine breaking even, two-two, after the first four rounds. We would work on offsetting Errol, invest in the body, and gradually begin taking something out of him.

"He needs to establish his jab to wreck the rhythm of Errol's jab. By the middle rounds, this will go against the grain a little; I would push Terence to be the puncher in this fight. I would want him walking down Errol. No one has backed Errol down before. Because Errol is viewed as the bigger guy, they assume he'll be the puncher in the fight. Crawford may be as strong as Errol. He can hit guys with brutal shots. In the championship rounds, Terence will need to impose himself on Errol. The way you deal with a truck that's trying to run you over is to flatten the tires. The early body investment will pay off here.

"I think that Crawford, if he can impose himself, he should go for it a little bit. Guys have shown Errol too much respect. Early on, Terence must be safe and smart. Later, we would take chances. Kell Brook and Yordenis Ugas were able to hit Errol with hybrid right hands. You have to change the angles of your shots, and Terence can do that. Change the angle of the right, because Errol likes to catch it with his right. After the fight settles down, Terence has to let Errol feel his viciousness. Terence can turn Errol and push him back. I wouldn't be opposed to Terence going for a late stoppage."

## JOSE BENAVIDEZ SR., ON HOW HE WOULD TRAIN ERROL SPENCE JR.:

"I'm looking at an eight- or nine-week training camp. That would be good for this fight. For the first seven weeks, we would spar Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, twice a day, and do strength and conditioning two to three times a week. It depends on where the fighter is. I like to start gradual and work my way up with the intensity, but each fighter is different, and I would base my decision on what kind of shape Errol is in.

"What I like to do the first week is move slow, build up the second week and increase sparring, and the third week that's when I would bring in the good sparring. I would look at two or three guys and ramp up the rounds. In the fourth and fifth weeks, move to eight- and 10-round sparring sessions. I like to get sparring partners that are fighting, not sitting around gaining weight. Preparing for Crawford, I would want boxers as sparring partners, guys who use their jab and use their distance, guys with good footwork. I would also use guys with deep amateur backgrounds, because Crawford is good at using distance, throwing straight punches and using his legs. We wouldn't want any brawlers. I usually use three sparring partners, but for this fight, I would use four guys.

"In weeks six and seven, we would look at how healthy Errol is. We taper down to twice a week but increase the round intensity. I like to go 12, 14 rounds to get it in the fighter's head that they went 14 rounds.

"For conditioning, I like to have my fighters swim the first week or two. In the fourth and fifth week, we would hit the road a little more. Yes, believe it or not, David swims. (laughs) I like it when my fighters don't know how to swim – David is not a good swimmer – because fighters that struggle in the water use more muscle in the water to push. Other muscle areas are working. We would do track running and running mountains and stadium stairs. I like the incline. I like to mix that up because it keeps the fighter active and his mind fresh. It also tricks the body. In the middle of training camp, we would run three days a week. Knowing Spence, his weight won't be an issue. In weeks eight and nine, we would taper down.

"I like to install the game plan right away. I've been studying Canelo Alvarez, for example, for four, five years, because David will be fighting him. I watched Crawford for two, three years, because I knew he would fight my son Jose Jr. I learned a lot about Crawford in breaking him down.

"The secret to beating Crawford is the jab. Once you throw that jab upstairs, feint a little bit, there are so many things you can do off that jab. You can throw a tap-touch jab, a stiff jab, feint jab, and once you throw that jab to the shoulder, then change it to the stomach and change it to the chest. That's the key to beat Crawford. The other key is to stay a little low and control him.

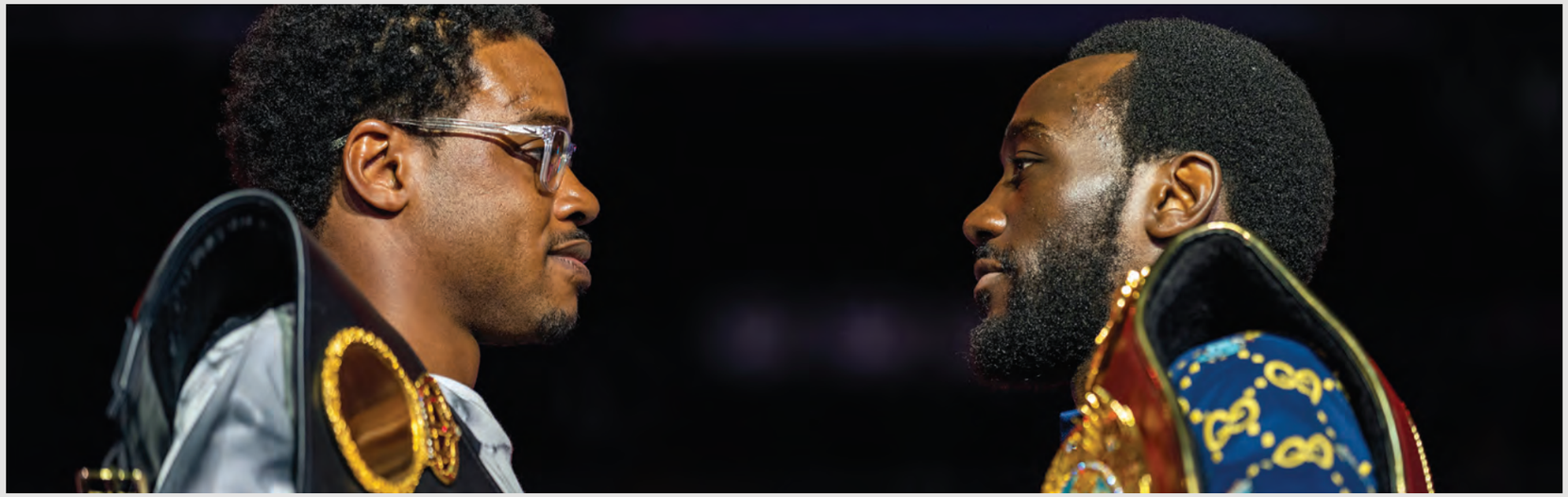
"I think differently and do things differently. I want to make sure about their mental state. I would be willing to wait and see how aggressive or how laid-back Crawford will be. I go round-by-round how a fighter will react. It depends on the first round, and from there, we can start building. I would go and adjust as the fight progressed. The key is staying low, working off the jab and cutting angles. You have to throw big shots to back Crawford up. We have to put pressure on Crawford to back him up, get on him and not let him build any confidence.

"If everything is working, the pressure is working, we would begin opening up and risking more in the middle rounds. By the championship rounds, we should have him figured out. We'll know what kind of condition Crawford is in. I think we're going to need to knock Crawford out to win. Crawford has never been stopped. He's never been in trouble since he fought [Yuriorkis] Gamboa [in June 2014]. Errol has to knock out Crawford to win. He must knock him out. Spence sits on his punches a little more than Crawford does.

"I will tell you right now, the only way Errol wins is if he knocks out Crawford. If he doesn't knock Crawford out, I don't think Errol can win. I love Errol Spence. I respect what he's done in his career. But in my mind, ever since that car accident [in December 2022], Errol has not been the same. Something happened there that has slowed his reflexes and his ability to think faster. He's capable of being outboxed, and Terence Crawford could do that. There's no other way to fight Crawford. If you try and box him, it's not going to happen." RING

*Joseph Santoliquito is an award-winning sportswriter who has been working for Ring Magazine/RingTV.com since October 1997 and is the president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. Follow him on Twitter @JSantoliquito.*

# THE FIGHTERS



## ERROL SPENCE JR.

**Record:** 28-0 (22 KOs)
**Age:** 33
**Height:** 5-foot-9½
**Reach:** 72 inches
**Location:** DeSoto, Texas
**Trainer:** Derrick James
**Titles held:** IBF/WBA/WBC
**Last fight:** TKO 10 Yordenis Ugas

TOP RANK INC

## TERENCE CRAWFORD

**Record:** 39-0 (30 KOs)
**Age:** 35
**Height:** 5-foot-8
**Reach:** 74 inches
**Location:** Omaha, Nebraska
**Trainer:** Brian McIntyre
**Title held:** WBO
**Last fight:** KO 6 David Avanesyan

ORTIZ: KEVIN ESTRADA/GETTY IMAGES; STANIONIS: COOPER NEILL

# HEALTHY OPTIMISM

## MEDICAL ISSUES ON BOTH SIDES RAISE QUESTIONS, BUT **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.** VS. **EIMANTAS STANIONIS** HAS "CROWD-PLEASER" WRITTEN ALL OVER IT

**By Adam Abramowitz**

**On July 8, Vergil Ortiz Jr. and** Eimantas Stanionis will square off in a highly anticipated and long-postponed welterweight matchup at the AT&T Center in San Antonio. For the Texan Ortiz, the fight will be a homecoming and he will surely expect to have a boisterous crowd in support. Stanionis is from Lithuania, but he is no stranger to fighting in the Lone Star State; this will mark his fifth appearance in Texas. Whoever wins will own the secondary WBA title and thus be in pole position to face the winner of the undisputed welterweight championship fight between Errol Spence Jr. and Terence Crawford on July 29.

For both Ortiz (19-0, 19 KOs) and Stanionis (14-0, 9 KOs), this is the perfect matchup to establish bona fides in the upper echelon of the welterweight division. Although both have had impressive rises, what each has lacked to this point is a win over one of the best at 147. This fight will solve that problem. The winner will be viewed as a legitimate contender – and perhaps the top contender – in the division.

Below are the keys to the fight, and I'll have a prediction at the end of the article.

**Vergil Ortiz Jr. (left) and Eimantas Stanionis are both in the top 5 of The Ring's welterweight rankings.**

### HEALTH

In assessing this matchup's range of possibilities, there are health concerns on both sides that could play an important role in what happens. The fight was originally scheduled for

## HEALTHY OPTIMISM

March 18, but Stanionis needed to have an emergency appendectomy. Now, appendectomies are fairly routine procedures, but they still require a fair degree of recovery time. The fight was then rescheduled for April 29, but Ortiz had to pull out because of the second instance in his career of rhabdomyolysis, which is a disintegration of skeletal muscle. There are multiple causes of rhabdomyolysis; a common one is overexertion. Ortiz has claimed that his illness was an effect of long COVID and has declared that he is now in great health.

Maybe Ortiz's health issues are past him, but maybe he still isn't at 100 percent. It's tough to tell until he gets into the ring. Ortiz has had issues in the past with cutting weight properly, and certainly there are questions about whether Ortiz is too big for welterweight. Did his hospitalization occur in part because of his inability to get to welterweight in a healthy way? I did ask someone who was close to Ortiz this exact question, and I was assured that Ortiz can still make 147 without a problem. But this is an issue that bears a close watch.

### JABS

This fight will feature two of the best jabs in the division. Ortiz's jab is a ramrod. It functions as a power punch. He also uses it in different ways – a range finder, a damage inflictor, a way to get inside and a way to set up combinations. He'll also double and triple the jab to great effect. Ortiz does have great power punches, but it would be wrong to classify his jab as a table-setter. It's often the main course in its own right.

Stanionis takes a high-volume approach and he works off the jab to set up combinations. One thing that he does well with the jab is throw it in dead moments of the fight. If Ortiz wants a break, Stanionis will just keep popping him with his stick. Stanionis also moves very well and he can jab on the run or as he's turning an opponent. He's very crafty with the punch. Although it doesn't have the blunt force of Ortiz's, Stanionis' jab is highly effective in helping him pile up points.

### ONE-PUNCH POWER

Here I think is the big separator between the two fighters. Although Stanionis is a solid puncher, he's not a one-punch knockout guy. He sets up shots. He throws combinations. He'll drop opponents by breaking them down gradually or hitting them with something in a multi-punch combination that they don't see well. But for true punching power, I don't believe that he's at the same level as Ortiz.

Ortiz will throw sickening body shots with both hands. He also features several weapons to the head, including his straight right, left hook and right uppercut. Because he goes to the body so viciously, his opponents have to overcompensate with their defense to protect their body, which leaves openings to the head. He can stop a fight to either head or body at any time, and with a multitude of punches. He's won all of his fights by knockout.

### ROUND-BY-ROUND CONSISTENCY

If there is one area where Stanionis might have a decided edge over Ortiz, it's his consistency, either within a round or through every round in a fight. Stanionis is a workhorse. Although he does have power and a respectable 64 percent KO ratio, he's there to win rounds and pile up points. Ortiz can start slow and often needs time to work his way into a fight. He was rocked and forced to hold in the second round of his shootout with Egidijus "Mean Machine" Kavaliauskas.

In addition, Stanionis has gone 12 hard rounds twice in his career, against Radzhab Butaev in his last fight and Thomas Dulorme in 2021. Meanwhile, Ortiz has never been past the ninth round. Stanionis knows that he has the gas tank to go 12, and Ortiz, who can start slowly and may have lingering questions about health, has yet to be tested this way. There could be a path to victory for Stanionis by being better in the first and final third of the fight.

Ortiz's bone-crunching power sets him apart from other welterwei ghts.

KEVIN ESTRADA/GOLDEN BOY

Stanionis scored a 12-round split decision over Radzhab Butaev.

COOPER NEILL/GETTY IMAGES

### PREDICTION:

I don't want to discount the health component for either fighter in this matchup. I'm not sure if Stanionis is 100 percent after his procedure, and I still have lingering concerns about Ortiz's ability to make welterweight safely. I know that Ortiz is going to test Stanionis' body, and that will tell us how healthy Stanionis is for this fight. In addition, I expect Stanionis to use his volume and movement to extend Ortiz to the latter portion of the fight. If Ortiz does have conditioning issues, Stanionis is the type of fighter who will expose that.

I expect this fight to be a high-level affair that will alternate between cerebral moments that reward technical skill and eye-opening exchanges that feature impressive power punches. Stanionis' movement, angles and jab will give Ortiz problems in the early portion of the fight. It wouldn't surprise me if he builds an early lead on the scorecards.

Ortiz will wisely invest in the body in the first third of the fight. He might not win all or most of those rounds, but his efforts will pay dividends later in the fight. While I don't expect Stanionis to stop his movement throughout the bout, I do think that he will be a little easier to find as the rounds progress.

In a battle where both guys will have their moments, I think that Ortiz's body assault will eventually deplete Stanionis. But Ortiz will have to earn it. He must put in the work to get the job done. Stanionis is not going to wilt on his own. The pick here is Ortiz by 11th-round stoppage, but it wouldn't surprise me if Stanionis is up on the cards at the time or if it's essentially a draw. Stanionis will look very good during portions of the fight. But ultimately, I think that he lacks a little bit of firepower. I'm not sure if he has the punch to knock out Ortiz, and Ortiz will eventually get through with enough damaging power shots to swing the fight his way.

**Vergil Ortiz Jr. defeats Eimantas Stanionis by 11th-round stoppage.** RING

# A Q&A WITH JARON "BOOTS" ENNIS

THE RING'S NO. 3-RATED WELTERWEIGHT DOESN'T LET TALK – EITHER HYPE OR CRITICISM – DISTRACT HIM FROM HIS GOAL OF BECOMING THE BEST OF THE LOADED 147-POUND DIVISION

By Joseph Santoliquito

**He has been christened the** future of boxing for some time now. Jaron "Boots" Ennis, however, does not pay much attention to talk and media hype. The Ring's No. 3-rated welterweight, who recently turned 26, is simply waiting patiently for his marquee fight to prove what he already knows – that he's the best of the deepest division in the sport.

Ennis (30-0, 27 knockouts) certainly fits the criteria. He is a boxing lifer, the sport embedded in his DNA by his father, trainer and manager, the renowned Derek "Bozy" Ennis, who is nearing 70 and is in better shape than most men half his age. »

**Fans were so used to watching Jaron Ennis score dazzling KOs that when Karen Chukhadzhian (opposite page) took him 12 rounds in January, some criticized "Boots" for his performance.**

INSET: PATRICK SMITH/GETTY IMAGES; JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/GETTY IMAGES

## A Q&A WITH JARON "BOOTS" ENNIS

Go to any small club show in the Philadelphia area, and you will undoubtedly see Bozy accompanied by Boots and the rest of the Ennis family (including two older brothers, who, like their father, are former professional boxers). When Boots is not training himself, he is often training other fighters. He wraps his own hands. He has been known to sneak into his North Philly gym at 2 or 3 in the morning by himself to get in some added work.

The Ennis family loves the sport. It's why Boots is so good. He has been practically wearing boxing gloves since birth.

On Saturday, July 8, Boots is scheduled to face Roiman Villa (26-1, 24 KOs), in what can be called a hometown fight at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, New Jersey. It headlines a PBC event on Showtime.

Ennis and Villa both appeared on the Gervonta Davis-Hector Luis Garcia undercard in January at Capital One Arena in Washington, D.C. Villa was impressive, upsetting the previously unbeaten Rashidi Ellis. Ennis, on the other hand, received some criticism in going 12 rounds for the first time in his career while easily beating Ukrainian Karen Chukhadzhian.

To his credit, Ennis pitched a shutout, winning 120-108 on all three scorecards. Yet, the standard that he has set for himself is so high, anything less than a knockout seems to be unacceptable to the boxing cognoscenti. Chukhadzhian did more running than fighting, and Ennis, for the first time as a pro, had to deal with a small taste of derision.

"I did learn a lot from that fight," Boots admitted. "But the other stuff, the outside stuff, I never really paid any attention to that. No one is going to be harder on me than I am on myself. Let people, let the media say what it wants to say. I knew there was talk after the [Chukhadzhian] fight.

"I didn't know exactly what it was. But again, the only one I have to please in that ring is myself. And I'm never pleased."

It is why Boots keeps ascending.

Looming in a big welterweight July is the Spence-Crawford showdown. They will meet for the vacant Ring Magazine welterweight title and to become the first undisputed welterweight champion in the four-belt era. Ennis made no commitment to whether he would be ringside for the actual fight, but he made certain to let The Ring know in this Q&A that he is ready and waiting in the wings for the winner.

Chukhadzhian lasted the distance with Boots but was dominated.

**THE RING:** What are you hoping to show in your July 8 return against Villa?

**JARON ENNIS:** I'm going to show everyone my skills. Villa is a pressure fighter and he is tailor-made for me.

Ring: In your last fight, and I mean this as a compliment, the bar is so high with you that anything less than a knockout seems like a defeat. In the Chukhadzhian fight, you won every round, yet to hear the talk ringside, I couldn't tell if you won or lost. Did you hear the criticism?

**JE:** People say what they want to say. People said I couldn't go 12 rounds; they question if I have a chin. People don't know what they want. I could fight a brick wall and knock it down, and someone will still have something to say. With me, I really don't care what people say. I don't go on social media. I don't really pay attention. As long as I'm winning, I don't care. At the end of the day, the media, social media, people out there talking, they're not the ones putting their lives on the line and getting in that ring. I am. So it really doesn't matter what anyone says. I'm going to keep grinding and keep doing what I do and get these belts.

**RING:** Were you satisfied with your last fight?

**JE:** I was satisfied going 12 rounds. That was it. There were a lot of things that I could have done better. I have another fight lined up with Villa and I'm going to show that I am a perfectionist. I raise my own bar. I never think I look good. I'm always looking to get better.

**RING:** What could you have done better in your last fight?

PATRICK SMITH

**JE:** I should have been more patient, jabbed more, done more body work. I was chasing him too much. I should have taken my time and walked him down.

**RING**: Will you go out to Spence-Crawford on July 29?

**JE:** I don't know. My main priority as we're talking right now is my fight on July 8.

**RING:** You feel the winner still has to go through you, right?

**JE:** That's right. The winner has to go through me. ... My priority at 147 is to get all the top belts, then move to 154 and do the same thing. My attitude hasn't changed. I want the top guys, and Spence and Crawford are the top guys.

**RING:** Any thoughts on Vergil Ortiz Jr. and Eimantas Stanionis, who will be fighting on the same night as you?

**JE:** That's a good fight. May the best man win. I have to do my thing, and I'll hopefully get the winner of Spence-Crawford or Stanionis-Ortiz. I'll be ready for anyone they put in front of me. I know whoever it is, they can't beat me. I'm not really about the talking. My hands will do the talking. When I put my hands on you, that's when I do my talking. I don't need to hype myself up before fights with talk. I know what I can do. Like I said, I'll let my hands do the talking.

**RING:** It seems like you pay a price for being too good. It's both a compliment and a curse that the top guys don't want to fight you because you are a big risk to them. Is that what you feel?

**JE:** I do. But I love boxing. It's why [the politics don't] bother me. It is hard to beat something you love. I love boxing. I'm always in the gym. It's why I've been patient with the politics. Boxing is like a second home to me. I have a great team around me. Cameron (Dunkin) is still involved. I have Showtime. And I have boxing. I guess I may follow in my dad's footsteps and take up after my dad as a trainer. I'm training guys now. I work with all the guys my dad works with. I'll probably be in (Andy) Cruz's corner on July 15 after my fight. I know guys fight for the money; I don't have a problem with those guys. It's what they do. But guys that love what they do, you can't beat guys like us. It's why I want to fight two, three more times before the end of the year.

**RING:** And right now, you and Stephen "Scooter" Fulton are the face of Philadelphia boxing. That means something to you, doesn't it?

**JE:** It means a lot to me. It means I come from a great tradition of Philly fighters, like B-Hop (Hall of Famer Bernard Hopkins), Danny Garcia, J-Rock (Julian Williams), and now myself and Scooter. I know I have the faith of Showtime and the people there. I would love to have a fight in Philly in the future at the Wells Fargo Center, with me and Scooter headlining the card. Scooter has two belts and he's not going to surprise me when he beats (Naoya) Inoue. He's bigger and stronger than Inoue. Scooter may shock the world when he wins, but he's not going to shock me, because I know he's going to win.

**RING:** So, I have to ask again: Will we see you ringside for Spence-Crawford?

**JE:** We'll see. I still have to do my part. I have more work to do, and those guys know I'm out here, whether I'll be ringside or not for that fight. They know I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. They know they're going to have beat me.

**RING:** I don't know if you can beat Spence or Crawford. But I don't know if they can beat you either.

**JE:** They can't.

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# FAIR PLAY

## FOUR YEARS AFTER **AMANDA SERRANO** WAS GIVEN HER SHOT AT **HEATHER HARDY'S** FEATHERWEIGHT TITLE, THE NOW-UNDISPUTED CHAMPION IS RETURNING THE FAVOR

**By Thomas Gerbasi**

**Heather Hardy has yet to watch her first fight with** Amanda Serrano.

"Sadly, no, I have not seen the first fight," Hardy said of the 2019 encounter. "I never watch any of my fights, actually. It's like hearing your voice on a recorder. (laughs) I hate watching myself fight, but I know I have to."

She has to because she's going to be stepping into the ring with the undisputed featherweight champion a second time on August 5 in Dallas' American Airlines Center.

The first time around, the two Brooklynites squared off at Madison Square Garden's Theater, and it wasn't pretty for "The Heat." Nearly stopped in the first round, she had her moments in bursts the rest of the way, but when the judges' scorecards were tallied, it was a clear and lopsided unanimous decision for Serrano, who took Hardy's WBO featherweight crown in the process.

Since that night in New York City, the two have gone down vastly different paths.

Serrano has fought eight times, winning all but one of those bouts as she unified the four major titles at 126 pounds. And the only loss wasn't really a loss, as she and Katie Taylor put on one of the best women's fights of all time, selling out Madison Square Garden's big room and earning each a million-dollar payday. Taylor scored a split decision win, but many believed Serrano deserved the nod, and whatever way you scored it, neither fighter's stock dropped.

As for Hardy, it's been a hard road back. There were injuries, a nearly two-year layoff, an upset 2021 loss in her return against Jessica Camara and the untimely death of her coach and mentor,

**Heather Hardy (left) lost a gutsy decision to Amanda Serrano in 2019.**

Hector Roca. But two wins in 2022-23 over Calista Silgado and Taynna Cardoso, plus a jolt of new energy in the corner with coach Martin Gonzalez, had Hardy believing that she had one more title run left in her. She just needed someone to give her that shot, so she took her case to the people, telling me in an interview for BoxingScene.com, "I ain't never disrespected nobody. I would never speak out of line with any fighter, because I am a fighter and because I am a woman. And I always kind of felt that as women, we've got to stick together because we've only got each other. So I would never disrespect another fighter. I know what it's like to be at the top. Now I'm looking up at these girls saying, 'Hey, will you give me a chance?' Not 'I deserve it,' not 'you owe it to me' – none of that, because life don't owe you shit. These girls don't owe me shit. So I'm sitting here now, saying, 'OK, I was at the top once, now I'm not. Now you're the top dog up there. Will you give me a chance?' That's it."

Amanda Serrano read that interview. And she offered Hardy a title shot.

"Heather asked for whoever from 126 to 135, and I was there," said Serrano. "I know she gave me that [first] shot. Heather was here from the very beginning, as well. She opened the doors. Being the first girl in the Barclays Center gave me and other girls an opportunity. I was able to fight in the Barclays Center because Heather put on a show and brought fans there. So you have to always give thanks to the people who open those doors. And a lot of these girls now, they forget who was here in the beginning. I've been a professional for 14 years. We were making $1,500 as a multiple-division world champion. These girls nowadays, they don't realize

**Hardy was punished by Serrano in the opening round, but she clawed back into the fight.**

that. So you definitely have to give back to the people who open up those doors."

The announcement of the rematch on the undercard of the Jake Paul-Nate Diaz fight took a lot of people by surprise. Hardy wasn't one of those people.

"When I did that interview calling out the champions, I was hoping something would stick somewhere and get me an opportunity," she said. "And right after, she (Serrano) was like, 'Yeah, I'll give you a shot.' I knew that nothing else needed to be said from there. I had her word and that was it."

But this is boxing. Hardy agrees, but she also knows that this is a unique case.

"It's like when they say someone's word is everything. She wouldn't have said nothing. And I knew right there that she gave me her word. That's it."

And now the two New Yorkers will travel to the Lone Star State for a fight with plenty of intrigue attached to it simply because of their first meeting and what's transpired since then. For Serrano, it's almost a lose-lose situation, given her place in the upper reaches of the pound-for-pound list. For Hardy, it's all upside. Win, and it's a new day for her career; lose, and that was expected. But Serrano isn't expecting a walk in the proverbial park, and Hardy isn't expecting to lose.

"I'm not the same person anymore," the 41-year-old Hardy said. "I'm not the same Heather in that ring no more. I know that I had moments where I was really boxing well. I felt that in the fight; I know I did. I almost got knocked down in the first round and really came back strong. But

again, the scorecards didn't show that, and that made me realize I'm not winning this fight outboxing anybody. I got to fight. I got to come to fight. I'm coming in to take someone's titles. I'm not defending belts. I'm coming to take belts, so I have to bring the fight like I want to take those belts home. I'm a different person. Forget about fighting. I'm a different person than I was in 2019."

So is Serrano, and while she has long been the hunter, the Puerto Rican star who has seven divisional world titles on a resume that will one day land her in the International Boxing Hall of Fame, is now the hunted. And she kind of likes that target on her back.

"You're the target because you're number one," Serrano said. "You're the one everyone's looking for. And they know I have all the titles. So all these girls in my division that want to be a champion, they have to go through me. And now they know that with the team that I'm with, MVP, they're going to get paid good money. So I'm a pretty good target. But they have to make sure that they hit it right on the spot to catch the prize."

The 34-year-old Serrano laughs, clearly comfortable reaping the rewards from years of hard work that often went unnoticed. But being comfortable doesn't mean being complacent. Her coach, manager and brother-in-law, Jordan Maldonado, makes sure of that, and Serrano is fine with the long hours in the gym and training like a challenger, not a champion.

"I love this lifestyle," she said when asked what keeps her hungry. "I love making history. I love showing young girls that no matter where you come from, no matter how you do it, you can accomplish anything you put your mind to. I have an amazing team that keeps pushing me every day, and that's what keeps me humble, and that's what keeps me pushing to continue to be the best that I can be. I'm hoping that I can show other women in this sport that we need each other to build this sport. I'm just a humble girl; I'm always going to be humble, always looking for discounts. (laughs) It's just me. And I just want to be the best person and best athlete that I can be."

SARAH STIER

**Hardy outpointed Tannya Cardoso over eight rounds in February.**

AL BELLO

**Serrano's bloody decision over Erika Cruz Hernandez made her an undisputed champ.**

As the rematch approaches, it's hard not to think back to Joe Louis' 1939 fight with John Henry Lewis. Lewis was a top-flight light heavyweight, but he was on the tail end of his career when his friend Louis gave him a shot at the heavyweight crown and one last payday. Louis won in the first round. I bring this fight up to Maldonado, wondering if this is a similar scenario. He disagrees.

"This is a theater of the unexpected, so you never know," said Maldonado. "And in boxing, one punch can change the whole shit. I've seen the weirdest stuff happen."

Hardy plans on making some of that happen in August.

"Somebody said, 'Oh, she couldn't beat her in 2019 when she was 37," said Hardy. "Man, you don't even know what this old lady got coming. I ain't my mama's 41, I promise you that." RING

# WORLD BEAT

## U.K.

**BY ARCHIBALD JAMES**

**May saw the U.K. crown a new** king and reaffirm a sitting queen when the coronation of Charles III was followed by undisputed junior welterweight champion Chantelle Cameron defeating the legendary Katie Taylor on a historic night in Dublin. For Taylor, the undefeated, undisputed lightweight champion, it was her 23rd professional contest but remarkably her first on home soil. Absence certainly made Irish hearts grow fonder, and the atmosphere ahead of the opening bell was extraordinary. But Cameron remained unmoved and set the tone with an assured opening round in which she bossed the action from the center of the ring. It was a pattern that largely continued throughout the fight, interspersed with the pockets of success that a fighter of Taylor's class will always have. Crowd reaction and slightly dubious commentary exaggerated the effect of those moments, as Cameron never looked truly fazed by anything coming back. Taylor's heart ensured every round was competitive, but by the end even her most loyal of fans sensed she'd come up short. One man who watched it thought she drew, and he happened to be one of the three scoring judges, but the other two just about managed to read the fight correctly to send Cameron home to Northampton still undefeated.

A week later, British boxing shot itself in the foot, in both feet actually, by scheduling three intriguing world title fights at the same time. At a boisterous Vitality Stadium in Bournemouth, local lad Chris Billam-Smith beat former gym mate Lawrence Okolie for the latter's WBO cruiserweight strap. In a typically messy affair, thanks to Okolie's penchant to throw and grapple in one fluent movement, the defending champ found himself docked points for holding in the fifth and seventh rounds. He also visited the canvas three times, with the first from a leaping left hook in the fourth round, the heaviest of the knockdowns. CBS did take some punishment in every session in between, but the sum of all the parts was enough to see the challenger comfortably home to the title on two of the scorecards. The dissenting judge's 112-112 draw caused a brief social media meltdown, but the right man won, so we all move on and patiently await the next scoring controversy.

**Chantelle Cameron ended Katie Taylor's epic win streak in front of a raucous Irish crowd.**

STEPHEN MCCARTHY / CONTRIBUTOR

Meanwhile in Manchester and Belfast, a couple of featherweight title fights were underway, with Leigh Wood seeking immediate revenge on Mauricio Lara and Michael Conlan challenging Luis Alberto Lopez for his IBF crown. Unfortunately for Lara, he had already forfeited his belt long before the first bell chimed in circumstances that Wood's trainer, Ben Davison, rightly described as a shambles. And a potentially dangerous shambles, at that. The WBA titleholder's fate was sealed on Wednesday at the British Boxing Board's three-day weight check when he registered at more than three percent above the championship limit. In other words, he was 130 pounds or higher, and the Board informed him they would not allow him to fight if he weighed less than 128.5 pounds on the following Friday (a policy apparently designed to discourage excessive water-loading). Already an ex-champ now, Lara subsequently weighed in at 129.8 pounds, and the Board merrily signed him off to fight a man who had actually put his body through the torture of making the 126-pound limit and who he had brutally knocked out just three months prior. It's well-known that few fighters will be legitimately within three percent of championship weight on the Wednesday of fight week, and those who water-load will be nowhere near it, so this well-meaning hoop boxers in the U.K. are forced to jump through is getting harder to comprehend. But when it merely serves to protect the interests of an overweight fighter at the expense of his energy-depleted rival, it becomes indefensible. If fighter safety was even the smallest consideration of all concerned, the fight would not have gone ahead. But with TV wanting their main event and the promoter wanting their full fee from TV, who was going to stop it?

As it turned out, the weight drama seemed to affect the champion much more than the challenger. Strangely tentative from the off, Lara was dropped heavily by an uppercut in the second round and never truly looked like he was getting back into the fight. A disciplined Wood executed his game plan to perfection, dominating the center and controlling the distance to pick off his man time and again. The three wide scores were no more than the new champ deserved.

Across the Irish Sea in Belfast, the SSE Arena was packed to the rafters to support local hero Mick Conlan as he made a second attempt to reach the top of the featherweight division. But if Lara was uncharacteristically subdued in Manchester, his compatriot Lopez was anything but in Ireland. Consummate boxer Conlan was never going to out-brawl Lopez, but he found himself almost immediately dragged into a firefight from the opening bell. The home favorite still managed to hold his own in winning the first couple of rounds, but the Mexican was far more comfortable in the shootout scenario and began dominating from the third onwards. It was all over in the fifth when Conlan dipped into an uppercut he didn't see coming and trainer Adam Booth sensibly threw the towel before the count completed.

Matchroom's show in a sparsely populated Wembley Arena on June 10 hosted three world title fights and three comfortable UD wins for the home fighters. First up to open the show was 41-year-old part-time secretary Nina Hughes making the first successful defense of her WBA bantamweight title in just her sixth professional contest. Opponent Katie Healy had only had six pro fights herself and none against the caliber of Hughes, so the one-way traffic throughout was as expected. Ellie Scotney then claimed the IBF junior featherweight strap from Australia's

**Lopez took down a local hero with his fifth-round knockout of Conlan.**

RAMSEY CARDY

Cherneka Johnson in just her seventh fight. Johnson never gave up, but Scotney was by far the more polished operator and won comfortably on all three cards. In the main event, Sunny Edwards made the fourth defense of his IBF flyweight crown, outclassing Chilean Andres Campos. Nicknamed "Showtime," Edwards at times tried too hard to entertain on his Matchroom debut. Lapses in concentration and/or effort from the champ gave Campos slivers of hope throughout, but the gulf in levels was too vast and all three judges concurred in scoring it 117-111. Time for a real challenge now, with a unification bout versus WBO beltholder Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez looking likely.

A few hours later in the basement of Madison Square Garden, Josh Taylor lost his Ring Magazine and WBO junior welterweight belts to a resurgent Teofimo Lopez. Despite their undoubted pedigrees, both men entered the ring with something to prove after a turbulent couple of years, career-wise. Taylor started well but soon appeared to lose his way as Lopez repelled attacks and countered with ease. His ability to land clean on the champion with a variety of shots from a range of angles increased as the fight wore on, and by the second half it looked like the Scot was already out of ideas. In the end, Taylor did well to hear the final bell, and the 117-111 scorecard was the only one of the three which reflected the reality of the previous 12 rounds. Teo once more has the world at his feet, while a fresh start at welterweight may well be the move for Josh.

Looking ahead, the early summer schedule is rather light in terms of marquee fights. Boxxer will showcase some of their leading prospects in York Hall on June 16 as junior welterweight Adam Azim, lightweight Caroline Dubois and heavyweight Frazer Clarke all face small step-ups in opposition. A couple of weeks later on July 1, their more seasoned stars will perform in the Manchester Arena. Unified super middleweight champion Savannah Marshall returns from her middleweight defeat to Claressa Shields with a title defense against American Franchon Crews-Dezurn. Mark Heffron defends his British super middleweight strap against Zak Chelli, and junior middleweight world champion Natasha Jonas is also listed to appear against an as-yet-unnamed opponent.

In another scheduling masterclass, Matchroom has its own show the same night with top prospect Dalton Smith defending his British and Commonwealth junior welterweight belts against veteran Liverpudlian Sam Maxwell in the Sheffield Arena. On the undercard, amateur standout Pat McCormack continues his fast-track to major titles with his first 10-round contest in only his fifth professional outing.

Other than that sprinkling of action, injuries to Josh Kelly and Liam Smith have meant their respective fights against Gabriel Alberto Corzo and Chris Eubank Jr. have been pushed back to later in the summer.

**Taylor met his match (and then some) in Lopez on June 10.**

# AUSTRALIA

**BY ANTHONY COCKS**

## A DREAM DELAYED BUT NOT DENIED

They say that boxing is the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. That was certainly the case for the Moloney twins, Jason and Andrew, who both fought for vacant WBO titles one week apart in May.

Bantamweight Jason "Mayhem" Moloney (26-2, 19 KOs) was first up to bat, taking on tough Filipino Vincent Astrolabio (18-4, 13 KOs) at Stockton Arena in Stockton, California, on May 13.

Jason boxed a classy fight, keeping the ever-pressing Astrolabio at range with his educated jab. Many observers felt the 32-year-old Australian deserved a wide points victory, but the judges' decision was surprisingly close.

Judge Tom Carusone scored the bout 114-114, while judges Robert Hoyle and Zachary Young both had it for Moloney by scores of 115-113 and 116-112, respectively.

"I couldn't believe it," said Jason, who is now ranked No. 1 by The Ring at 118 pounds. "I didn't think it was that close of a fight, to be honest. You never really know how the judges are seeing the fight. I guess some like the boxer, some like the aggressor, but when you're talking clean punches landed, he barely hit me with anything really.

"I felt I was boxing his ears off pretty comfortably. And I was checking in with my corner throughout the fight just to make sure. As a fighter, you think you know how the fight is going, but I kept checking with my trainer Angelo Hyder and the team, and they kept telling me I was winning the rounds."

Jason admitted he strayed from the original game plan, but only because he injured his right hand in the early rounds. Boxing is a sport of deception, though, and he managed to disguise his injured mitt not only to Astrolabio but also to the crowd and the ESPN commentators, as well as his own corner.

"The game plan wasn't so much to box the way I did," he explained. "I only really had to do that to adapt the game plan because I hurt my right hand so bad that even though it was landing, the pain was just so bad that I had to limit how much I was throwing it.

"I just tried to keep behind the jab and box and move him a bit more, but in doing that I felt like I was winning the rounds comfortably. When the fight finished, I thought this was probably 10 rounds to two or nine rounds to three. When the first judge came back with 114-114, my heart just sank. I was worried they were going to rip me off. But when the other two judges' scorecards came back, especially the 116-112, I was pretty confident it was going my way, because as bad as I thought 114-114 was, I thought there's no way you could score it 116-112 for Astrolabio. I was pretty relieved when they announced me as the winner.

"I thought it was a much wider margin, but at the end of the day, a win's a win."

After the high of Jason winning his first world championship on his third attempt, his brother Andrew was not so lucky.

Fighting exactly one week later at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, Nevada, junior bantamweight Andrew Moloney (25-3, 16 KOs) had the tougher assignment on paper against rising Japanese star Junto Nakatani (25-0, 19 KOs), a tall and rangy southpaw with genuine pop in his punches.

Not much went right for Andrew on the night. A long uppercut thrown from the outside sent him to the canvas in the second round. It was the sort of blow that only boxers like Nakatani and Emanuel Navarrete can throw and land from that range.

It didn't help that Andrew perforated his right eardrum during the fight, but he admits he was simply bested by the better man on the night.

"I always felt like it was going to be a difficult style, that tall southpaw style and the way he wants to keep you at long distance," Andrew said. "But we had really good sparring partners that I felt replicated Nakatani really good. I was able to close the distance and got really comfortable with that style against them as sparring partners. I felt really comfortable with it, but when I got in the ring with Nakatani, he was just that class above.

"Closing the distance with him was much, much harder. He just kept taking that one step back and trying to walk me onto shots, which he's very good at."

In the 11th, Andrew was on the deck again, and between rounds his trainer Hyder warned him he had to show him something in the final frame or he would stop the fight. Andrew was knocked out cold with just 18 seconds left in the bout, but he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm just absolutely rapt Angelo didn't stop the fight," he said. "I really feel like there would have been a lot of regret and just constant thought of what could have happened in round 12 if he hadn't let me go on. It's not like it's a fight when I'm on my way up to save me for another fight. That was everything we had worked for, for over 20 years.

"I'm really grateful he gave me the opportunity. The only thing that makes it slightly easier to accept the loss is that I know I gave it everything I had and I continued trying to win every second of the round. If he pulled me out at the end of the 11th and I didn't get the opportunity to do that, I would've been really, really disappointed.

"Going into that 12th, I made the decision myself that I could have boxed behind my jab and used my feet and gone the distance, but

**Andrew Moloney may have suffered the KO of the Year against the formidable Junto Nakatani.**

SARAH STIER/GETTY IMAGES

I wouldn't have given myself the chance to win the fight. I knew at that point I needed a knockout to win, so I made the conscious decision to go out on my shield and to try to get the knockout myself. If that meant me getting knocked out in return, so be it."

Both of the Moloneys are already plotting their next moves, with Jason chasing unification bouts and Andrew planning a move down in weight.

There are built-in storylines for Jason's dreams. He lost his first world title challenge to then-IBF champion Emmanuel Rodriguez by split decision five years ago and is keen to get revenge. The 30-year-old Puerto Rican is expected to face Melvin Lopez for the vacant IBF strap on July 15.

Then there is WBA boss Takuma Inoue; he's the younger brother of Japanese phenom Naoya Inoue, who stopped Jason in seven rounds in a world title bout three years ago.

Also waiting in the wings is evergreen Nonito Donaire, who at 40 years of age remains one of the best in the weight class. He is slated to face Alejandro Santiago for the vacant WBC belt in Las Vegas on July 15.

Any of these matchups would produce fireworks.

As for Andrew, he made the surprise admission that he plans to move down to the 112-pound weight class after exhausting his options at junior bantamweight. But don't think this is a rash move. Talks have been happening in his camp about this for some time.

"We've had a brief discussion with the team, but we haven't even spoken to Top Rank about it," Andrew revealed. "But Angelo and I have spoken about it. I believe I'm going to go to 112 pounds now, go down to flyweight and have another crack at a world title. And I believe it's probably a faster route back to world championship level.

"There's some great fights there to be made. It's something I've tossed up in my mind, moving down to flyweight, and it's the perfect time to do it. I feel like I'll be very strong at that weight and I believe I can become world champion, so the dream is still alive. I'll get back to the drawing board, move down to flyweight and become world champion there. That is the plan."

## 'THE GHOST' PROVES TOO ELUSIVE FOR RA'EESE ALEEM

Junior featherweight Sam "The Ghost" Goodman (15-0, 7 KOs) proved his Ring-rated credentials with a well-earned 12-round decision victory over Ra'eese "The Beast" Aleem (20-1, 12 KOs) in the main support bout to the Tim Tszyu vs. Carlos Ocampo fight at the Gold Coast Convention Centre in Broadbeach, Queensland on June 18 local time.

The fight was broadcast on Showtime in the U.S. and carried on Main Event and Kayo pay-per-view domestically.

The 32-year-old Aleem, a native of Muskegon, Michigan, who now boxes out of Las Vegas, was competitive in the first half of the fight, but the local lad made the necessary adjustments to dominate the back half of the fight.

Judges Adam Height and Daniel Sandoval scored the bout for Goodman 117-111 and 116-112 respectively. The only surprise was that judge Masakazu Murase scored the fight the other way, 116-112 for Aleem.

**Sam Goodman is now a junior featherweight player.**

With the victory, Goodman puts himself in the box seat to face recently crowned IBF and WBA titleholder Marlon "Nightmare" Tapales (37-3, 19 KOs). The 31-year-old Filipino southpaw is ranked No. 2 by The Ring.

Speaking to The Ring prior to the fight, the 24-year-old Goodman, from Albion Park in New South Wales, reflected on his previous wide points win over former IBF 122-pound titleholder TJ Doheny (23-4, 17 KOs) in his previous bout in March.

"It was definitely my biggest test, at least on paper," said Goodman, who held a large part of his camp for that fight in the U.S., sparring the likes of Azat Hovhannisyan and Jesse "Bam" Rodriguez.

"Doheny was a former world champion and I knew he was a good opponent. It was a massive camp for that fight. I did a big part of that over in America. I was meant to fight him on the Charlo-Tszyu card, which obviously got canned. We already had America booked, so we went and spent about eight weeks over there again and got top-notch work and sparring and based ourselves out of L.A. for a good while and we had a really good camp."

Aleem represented another step up in class. The undefeated American came in fresh off a 10-round shutout victory over Mike Plania (28-2, 15 KOs), The Ring's No. 9 contender at the time, in September. Plania was on the deck in the second round.

Goodman was under no illusion as to the challenge he was up against.

"He's a good fighter and he can do a bit of everything," Goodman said. "He's got a few strings to his bow, but I think in many aspects I'm better than him. I'm faster than him, I think I'm a bit better than him, and I think my ring I.Q. is much better than him.

"He's a good opponent, I just think I'm better in most departments. He is a good fighter, though, and I want these types of fights. The IBF obviously ordered this one, but we were never shying away from it. I'm going in there to do a job on him and to run through this bloke."

CHRIS HYDE/GETTY IMAGES

Aleem's unorthodox style was something Goodman said he was wary of going into the early rounds.

"His style is very different. It's not the traditional style of an American fighter," Goodman said. "He does a few things that are a bit different. It's just about how quick I can work that out, to be honest.

"I've seen a few of his fights where he has looked quite sloppy, especially when he tries to push that pace. When he tries to push that pace, he almost undoes himself. But he is capable of boxing as well, so I don't know which Aleem we're going to get, but I'll be prepared for all of them. I'll get the best possible work I can get in, and like I said, I'll be ready for whatever he brings."

Goodman admitted he was not content to be ranked No. 10 by The Ring. Now that he has defeated The Ring's No. 5-rated junior featherweight, he can expect to be elevated further.

"It's a good little thing to say we're heading in the right direction, but if they think I'm happy with No. 10, they're completely wrong," he said.

"I want the top spot and I'm not stopping until I get it."

## THE STRANGE CAREER OF STEVIE SPARK

The career trajectory of Stevie "The Viking" Spark (16-3, 14 KOs) is fast becoming legend.

In his three biggest fights to date, the 26-year-old junior welterweight from Toowoomba has been knocked out in three frames, won a fight by DQ and lost a 10-round split decision.

So why does his star continue to shine so bright?

Quite simply, it was the nature of those results and the platforms that they were broadcast on.

Two years ago, Spark received a late call to replace Michael Zerafa against Tim Tszyu. Jumping up two weight classes, he was stopped with a body shot in three. The fight was broadcast nationally on Main Event in Australia and ESPN+ in the US.

Four fights later, Spark made his U.S. debut against the highly-regarded Montana Love (18-1-1, 9 KOs), who was undefeated at the time. The bout was broadcast on DAZN.

Spark took the fight to Love from the get-go, dropping him in the second round and applying relentless pressure. When Love got cut from an accidental head clash in the fifth, he panicked at the sight of his own blood, rushing across the ring at the start of the sixth and tipping Spark over the top rope. In a remarkable show of agility, Spark did a full backflip and landed on his feet on the concrete floor.

With a bewildered smile on his face, Spark jogged up the steps and slid through the ropes to continue the battle, only to discover Love had been disqualified. The bout was even on two of the judges' scorecards at the time.

In his last outing in May, Spark was given the golden opportunity to fight on the undercard of the undisputed super middleweight championship fight between Canelo Alvarez and John Ryder in Mexico, again on DAZN. This time, his opponent was Gabriel Gollaz Valenzuela (27-3-1, 16 KOs).

Spark lost a split decision by scores of 94-95, 93-96 and 95-94. Most observers felt Spark won the fight going away. If the fight took place off TV, most fans would be unaware of the robbery that took place. Adding to the controversy, the local boxing commission swapped out two of the approved judges at the last minute.

**Spark's had ups and downs but has grown from it.**

Those two replacements – Erika Contreras and Ruben Cruz, both of Mexico – awarded the fight to Valenzuela.

Spark reflected on the rollercoaster of his career over the past couple of years.

"The Tszyu fight never really affected my career, long term," he said. "I already had a plan for what I wanted to do at 140, and the only fight I've lost at the weight is my last one, which I pretty much didn't lose anyway. We're happy with where my career is at right now. I'm still only 26, and we're confident I'm going to get a world title shot in the next 12-18 months."

Spark admits he desperately wanted to knock out Love but says in hindsight the way the bout ended only served to raise his profile further, with the clip of the finish going viral.

"Things happen really quickly in fights, and before you know it, you're back in the dressing rooms," he reflected. "It's one of those things that sort of just happened so fast. I thought, 'I'm going over here,' so I tucked my head to make sure I didn't land on my neck or anything like that. I actually didn't know the fight had been called off until I got back to my corner and learned he was disqualified. In saying that, I definitely would've liked to get a proper knockout over him. But he just wanted a way out for sure. He was looking for every way to get out of it. But it is what it is.

"My last two fights, I've gained a lot of worldwide coverage because of the way they have gone. Even the one in Mexico; if I got the win there it would have been just another victory on my record, but it's got so much controversy surrounding it around the world – everyone is calling it one of the biggest robberies, so it got a lot of media attention.

"We have spoken to the IBF, the WBC and the WBA, and they're not changing my world ranking. And my IBF world ranking just came out a few days ago and I've stayed the same, No. 7 in the world."

Spark has performed well enough to impress Matchroom Boxing boss Eddie Hearn, who is keen to capitalize on the rising popularity of the Australian.

"Matchroom is going to put a show on here in Australia that I will headline, which will be exciting," said Spark, who would like to return to the ring around August or September. "We don't know when it will be just yet; it's really up to them. They've got the busiest schedule in the world, so it's really up to them when they can fit it in and get back Down Under and for everyone to get down here to make it happen."

### SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS AS JAI OPETAIA IS READY TO RETURN TO THE RING

It came as no surprise to Mick Francis of Tasman Fighters that mandatory contender Masteusz Masternak (47-5, 31 KOs) decided IBF and Ring magazine champion Jai Opetaia (22-0, 17 KOs) was a bridge too far for the Polish veteran at this stage of his career.

The manager of the undefeated Australian southpaw voiced his concern to The Ring less than a week out from the scheduled purse bid.

"I had a text message from Ben Keilty from the IBF saying that Masternak may step aside and fight Chris Billam-Smith instead," Francis told The Ring. "Ben told me that the IBF had received an email from the Poles saying they wanted to step aside. So I spoke to the Polish and they said they were considering their options."

Days later, Masternak withdrew from the purse bid process to chase a shot at recently crowned WBO titleholder Chris Billam-Smith (18-1, 12 KOs), who claimed the belt in an ugly fight against Lawrence Okolie (19-1, 14 KOs) last month.

It was just another setback for the 27-year-old Opetaia, who has been on the sidelines for almost a year after suffering two fractures to his jaw in his title-winning effort against Mairis Briedis (28-2, 20 KOs) at the Gold Coast Convention Centre in Broadbeach, Queensland last July.

His career was further delayed by court proceedings against former promoter Dean Lonergan, who failed to provide TV dates for his star boxer in breach of their contractual agreement.

While sitting on the sidelines, Opetaia had surgery on a niggling shoulder injury but was back in the gym and raring to go against Masternak in Australia on a mid-July fight card if Tasman Fighters had won the now-aborted purse bid.

But it seems the 36-year-old Masternak wasn't as keen on the assignment as the champion.

"What a waste of time," an exasperated Opetaia said. "Masternak used to be a good fighter; now he's a has-been. I would've retired him. If you don't want the smoke, why waste the last few months talking shit?"

Francis was equally frustrated.

"They've really done nothing but stall, duck and dive," he said. "They should be embarrassed. If they didn't want to fight Jai, they could've told us months ago.

"They're going to go a much softer route by facing Chris Billam-Smith, and now we will negotiate with Boxxer Promotions about bringing Richard Riakporhe to Australia," Francis said. "That's our intention, and having an Aussie smash a Pom always goes down well here."

The IBF has given the two camps until July 14 to reach an agreement for the fight. Riakporhe (16-0, 12 KOs) defeated Billam-Smith four years ago by split decision and is coming off a fourth-round knockout victory over Polish veteran and former WBO cruiserweight titleholder Krzysztof Glowacki in January.

"Richard probably thinks all his Christmases have come at once by being gifted a world title shot, but he's about to find out that Jai Opetaia is a different animal," Francis said.

**Jai Opetaia (above) vs. Richard Riakporhe is in the works.**

# SOUTH AFRICA

**BY DROEKS MALAN**

It did not go well for Ludumo Lamati when he took on Nick Ball in a battle of undefeated featherweights in Belfast, Ireland, in late May.

Not only did he suffer his first defeat when his corner threw in the towel in the 12th round to save him from further punishment, he collapsed moments later and was rushed to the hospital. After spending days in an induced coma, at the time of writing he was awake, speaking and eating. "He is progressing in the right direction, but there is still some way to go before recovery," said manager Colin Nathan.

Fighting in the main supporting bout on the Luis Alberto Lopez-Michael Conlan card, Lamati started off fairly well in a quiet first round, boxing behind his jab and landing a sneaky uppercut. He mixed in a straight right to the body in the second, while Ball switched stances between orthodox and southpaw, trying to find his groove.

He found it in the third, landing hard combinations to the body and then roughing up Lamati on the inside, getting away with wrestling and tugging his opponent.

Lamati let his hands go in the fourth. He started a combination to the body, ending to the head, but an unperturbed Ball responded by bullying his opponent and landing the harder shots inside.

Ball took over in the fifth, landing a left uppercut to the body, backing Lamati to the ropes. A big straight right turned the South African's head towards the end of the round.

From then on it was one-way traffic. Lamati hung in there and tried valiantly to turn the tide, but he did not have or was unable to execute a plan B. He started bleeding from the nose in the sixth, and everything he did, Ball did harder and better. His left hook got answered by a more damaging one from Ball. He tried going downstairs, but Ball walked through it and responded with combinations to the head and body.

The South African had a desperate look about him in the eighth. Perhaps taking heart from the fact that Ball finally got a warning for punching on the break in the ninth, Lamati came forward with more urgency in the 10th. He tried his best to put his opponent on the back foot. It was to no avail. A left hook-right hand combination from Ball made him stumble in his corner and the follow-up attack had him reeling across the ring to the opposite corner before the round ended.

Lamati landed his best punch of the fight in the 11th, a straight right bang on the button, but Ball simply covered up and got back to work.

A right uppercut from Ball buckled Lamati's legs in the 12th, and the towel came flying in as the U.K. fighter was teeing off on him. The time of the stoppage was 2:15.

With the win, Nick Ball moves to 18-0 with 11 knockouts. He is an exciting addition to the featherweight division.

Ludumo Lamati ends his career with a very respectable 21-1-1 record with 11 knockouts. He is a former South African champion with a slew of international sanctioning body belts in his trophy case.

The boxing community continues to keep him in its thoughts and prayers and wishes him a speedy and full recovery.

On a more positive note, Cape Town junior lightweight Lunga Sitemela scored a win on the road. He beat Steven Bagwasi on a third-round TKO when his opponent could not continue, citing a shoulder injury.

Fighting in Bagwasi's hometown of Gaborone, Botswana, Sitemela started in his usual style, coming forward behind his jab, banging in shots to the body and dropping in the overhand right. He seemed the stronger of the two in backing up his opponent.

Bagwasi started to let his hands go in the second round, trying to find openings around Sitemela's high guard. He did manage to land a good left hook towards the end of the round, but it was Sitemela coming forward and landing the bulk of the shots.

The house fighter landed a decent left uppercut in the third, but Sitemela, true to his nickname of "The Pressure Cooker," drove him back once again. After eating a right from the South African, he took a jab to the face moments later, attempted a left hook and took a knee on the canvas. He got up, but as the referee waved them together again, he once again went down, tapping his left shoulder with his glove, indicating that he could not continue. The fight

**Ludumo Lamati (left) suffered serious injuries from his brutal fight with Nick Ball on May 27.**

RAMSEY CARDY

was stopped at the 1:15 mark.

It was an unsatisfactory end to what was shaping up to be a good battle, but one got the feeling that the momentum was behind Sitemela. Strangely, this was the second fight that Sitemela won when his opponent injured his shoulder.

Sitemela now improves to 16-1 with 10 stoppages while Bagwasi drops to 8-2.

## JAPAN

**BY YURIKO MIYATA**

The big fight is approaching. In Japan, it isn't Spence-Crawford, it's the WBC/WBO 122-pound championship between defending titleholder Stephen Fulton and Naoya Inoue, who will be invading his fourth weight class on July 25. The junior featherweight showdown, which was rescheduled from May 7 due to a training injury Inoue suffered in March, will take place at Ariake Arena in Tokyo.

There was a hectic grab for the tickets, starting at 11,000 up to 220,000 (approximately $80-$1,500), and it got more competitive when the fight moved from the 17,000-seat Yokohama Arena to the lesser capacity (12,000 seats) of Ariake Arena.

Fans can usually buy boxing tickets online, direct from the promoters (and sometimes the boxers), as well as the fifth-floor office of Tokyo's famous fighting venue Korakuen Hall. But that's not been the case with Naoya Inoue's fights since he's become a major figure in world boxing. The only way to get tickets to The Monster's fights is through a lottery that is operated exclusively by Ohashi Boxing Gym, the Japan-based promoter Inoue signed with out of the amateurs.

The rumor is that about 100,000 people applied for it via Ohashi Boxing Gym's official website between May 12-June 6. When the result was released on June 9, some fans posted "I lost it!" with crying emojis on Twitter. The winners had to complete payment by June 12 to secure the identified ticket. Cancellations and resales will be available only on the Rakuten (ticket reservation and sales) website starting on July 1.

All of those restrictions in the ticket-buying process still didn't discourage fans from buying up all of the available seats in the arena so they could witness a milestone fight in Inoue's career. For the first time in five years, Inoue will enter the ring as a challenger, and he will be up against the best fighter in the 122-pound division. Excitement is guaranteed.

★★★

**The two-month delay of Fulton-**Inoue allowed for a fascinating co-feature to be added to the show – an all-southpaw matchup between Olympic medalists Robeisy Ramirez and Satoshi Shimizu.

Ramirez (12-1, 7 KOs), The Ring's No. 5-rated featherweight, will attempt to make the first defense of his WBO title against 37-year-old contender Shimizu (11-1, 10 KOs), a stablemate of Inoue. The 29-year-old Cuban is a gold medalist of the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games.

Shimizu, the bronze medalist at featherweight in the 2012 London Games, held a press conference at Ohashi Boxing Gym in Yokohama in late April.

"I am glad and grateful that I finally have the chance to be a world champion, which has been my goal since I turned pro at the age of 30," he said. "It wasn't an easy journey, suffering a loss and a pandemic, so I am determined to snatch the belt from Ramirez."

**There's no hotter ticket in Japan than The Monster.**

Although it took four years for the amateur star Ramirez to win his first world title after suffering a shocking defeat in one of the most anticipated pro debuts in recent years, his boxing knowledge and technique are unarguable. He won the WBO featherweight belt (vacated by Emmanuel Navarrete) by unanimous decision over former 122-pound titleholder Isaac Dogboe in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on April 1. And now he is coming to Japan to defend it.

"I do know Shimizu was an Olympian and a good fighter," Ramirez told The Ring at the post-fight press conference for the Devin Haney-Vasiliy Lomachenko lightweight championship in Las Vegas on May 20. "I am going to study him profoundly in preparation for the fight. I am looking forward to going to your beautiful country. The fans there are very passionate and loyal and very knowledgeable about boxing."

The 5-foot-11 Shimizu has his own unique boxing style backed by an awkward rhythm and stone hands. He kept building his amateur career after he represented Japan for the first time at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, turning down good offers from professional stables. He validated that choice when he won a bronze medal by beating Dogboe in London four years later. Shimizu turned pro in 2016 on the fast track, winning the OPBF (Oriental and Pacific Boxing Federation) featherweight title in his fourth fight. His progress was disrupted when suffered an orbital bone fracture in his ninth fight in July 2019, resulting in a sixth-round stoppage loss to Filipino Joe Noynay. It took a year for him to resume fighting, but three wins in a row, including a 12-round unanimous decision over then-undefeated young prospect Musashi Mori in May 2021, has brought him to where he is now.

"Of course Ramirez has great technique, as he is a two-time Olympic champion," said Shimizu. "He has good speed and long arms. But there must be something in him that I can take advantage of to win."

Shimizu has teamed up with two fellow London Olympians – Katsuaki Susa, who fought Ramirez there, and Yasuhiro Suzuki – to figure out the game plan. "We work together to increase the chance of winning to make my dream come true," he said.

★★★

**Former WBA middleweight** titleholder Ryota Murata, former lightweight contender Masayoshi Nakatani, former IBF 122-pound beltholder Ryosuke Iwasa and two pioneers of Japanese female boxing – Etsuko Tada and Naoko Fujioka – put periods on their deep and memorable fighting careers one after another in March and April.

I can't imagine how hard it is for boxers to say "No mas" to what they love and have devoted themselves to. Murata, the 2012 Olympic middleweight champ, took almost a year to make his decision public after losing his gutsy battle of attrition against future Hall of Famer Gennadiy Golovkin.

Nakatani, whose signature victory was an up-from-the-canvas ninth-round KO of Felix Verdejo in Las Vegas in December 2020, decided to end his 11-year pro career with a post on Twitter. He made 11 defenses of the OPBF lightweight title that he won in his seventh pro fight in January 2014 before finally getting to face Teofimo Lopez in an IBF title eliminator in Maryland in July 2019. The tall puncher suffered an orbital bone fracture in the hard battle with The Ring's 2018 Prospect of the Year, who entered the ESPN-televised bout on a five-KO streak. However, Nakatani never gave up, fighting until the final bell. Seventeen months later, he restarted his career under Teiken Promotions and scored the dramatic victory against Verdejo that led him to facing Vasiliy Lomachenko (who had just lost his belts to Lopez) in June 2021. Although he was stopped in the ninth round by the future Hall of Famer and suffered a sixth-round stoppage to Shuichiro Yoshino last November, he will be remembered for the world-class challenges he made.

The tall southpaw "Samurai" Iwasa was guided by former world champion Celes Kobayashi since he was 14 years old. Iwasa became a world titleholder by stopping Yukinori Oguni in the sixth round to snatch the IBF junior featherweight title in September 2017. After he lost it to TJ Doheny of Ireland in his second defense the following year, he returned to the ring mentally tougher and put on more exciting fights. The best punch of his career might be the short left that dropped Marlon Tapales in the 11th round to win the IBF interim title in New York in 2019. That stoppage win was Iwasa's ticket to challenge then-WBA/IBF champion Murodjon Akhmadaliev, who stopped him in five rounds. The arguably premature nature of the loss, which took place in Akhmadaliev's native Uzbekistan, left Iwasa unsatisfied until he was taken the eight-round distance by undefeated prospect Japhethlee Llamido, losing a unanimous decision in South Korea in mid-April.

"I lost to him completely, and I can say I am done. No regrets at all," Iwasa said during a press conference in his home gym in Kashiwa, Chiba on June 6.

Saying farewell to Tada and Fujioka means an end to the first wave of women's boxing in Japan. Tada must be called a true leader – not only because she defended her WBA strawweight title nine times from 2009 to 2014, won the IBF title in 2015 and the WBO belt in 2018 and 2020 – but also because she won a bronze medal at flyweight – the very first female amateur boxing international medal for Japan – in the inaugural Asian championship in Thailand in 2001. This victory convinced the Japan Amateur Boxing Federation to officially launch female competition that year.

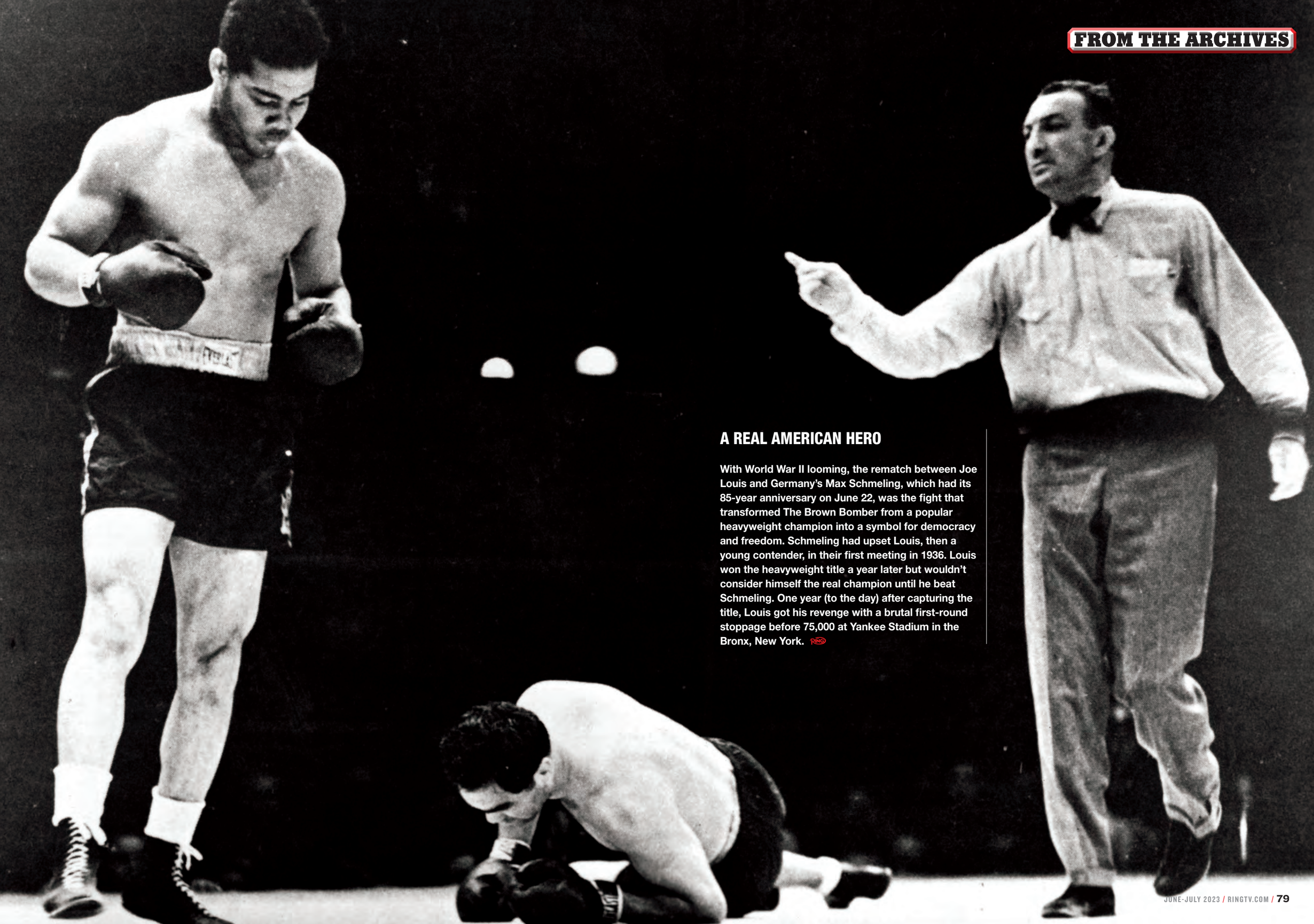
**Lightweight contender Masayoshi Nakatani has hung up his gloves.**

Fujioka seemed to fight forever, as the 47-years-young boxer exhibited never-fading strength in the ring. After turning pro at the age of 33 as a top national amateur in 2009, she made whatever she dreamed of come true, winning five world titles in five weight classes – from strawweight to bantamweight – defending her WBA flyweight belt against respected contender Sulem Urbina in Los Angeles (the first ever victory by a Japanese woman in a title fight in the U.S.) and challenging Marlen Esparza for the inaugural Ring Magazine female flyweight championship in San Antonio, Texas, last April. Despite losing by unanimous decision, her performance impressed Robert Diaz, then-Golden Boy Promotions' vice president, enough to say that he would get her another chance.

"I will bring you back to the U.S. again," he promised, but it was of course hard to deliver. She decided to retire from competition after a year had passed since the Esparza fight. "I appreciated Robert's words. I'm honored enough to hear that. And I figured I did everything in this sport! I have nothing left to do. That's why I would call it graduation, not retirement."

Now Tada is running a gym in her hometown, Kobe, and Fujioka is taking the time to help younger generations in every way to make their dreams come true, because they are pioneers.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK INC



## A REAL AMERICAN HERO

**With World War II looming, the rematch between Joe Louis and Germany's Max Schmeling, which had its 85-year anniversary on June 22, was the fight that transformed The Brown Bomber from a popular heavyweight champion into a symbol for democracy and freedom. Schmeling had upset Louis, then a young contender, in their first meeting in 1936. Louis won the heavyweight title a year later but wouldn't consider himself the real champion until he beat Schmeling. One year (to the day) after capturing the title, Louis got his revenge with a brutal first-round stoppage before 75,000 at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, New York.** RING

# COMING UP

**Errol Spence Jr. and Terence Crawford are as ready as we are for their much-anticipated undisputed welterweight championship bout.**

## JULY

JULY 15 – Alyicia Baumgardner vs. Christina Linardatou, junior lightweights (for Baumgardner's undisputed championship), Detroit (DAZN).

JULY 15 – Nonito Donaire vs. Alejandro Santiago, bantamweights (for vacant WBC title), Las Vegas (Showtime).

JULY 22 – George Kambosos Jr. vs. Maxi Hughes, lightweights, Shawnee, Okla. (ESPN/ESPN+).

JULY 25 – Stephen Fulton vs. Naoya Inoue, junior featherweights (for Fulton's WBC/WBO titles), Yokohama, Japan (ESPN+).

JULY 28 – Seniesa Estrada vs. Leonela Yudica, strawweights (for Estrada's Ring/WBA/WBC titles), Las Vegas (ESPN+).

JULY 29 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Terence Crawford, welterweights (for vacant Ring, Spence's IBF/WBA/WBC and Crawford's WBO titles), Las Vegas. (Showtime PPV).

## AUGUST

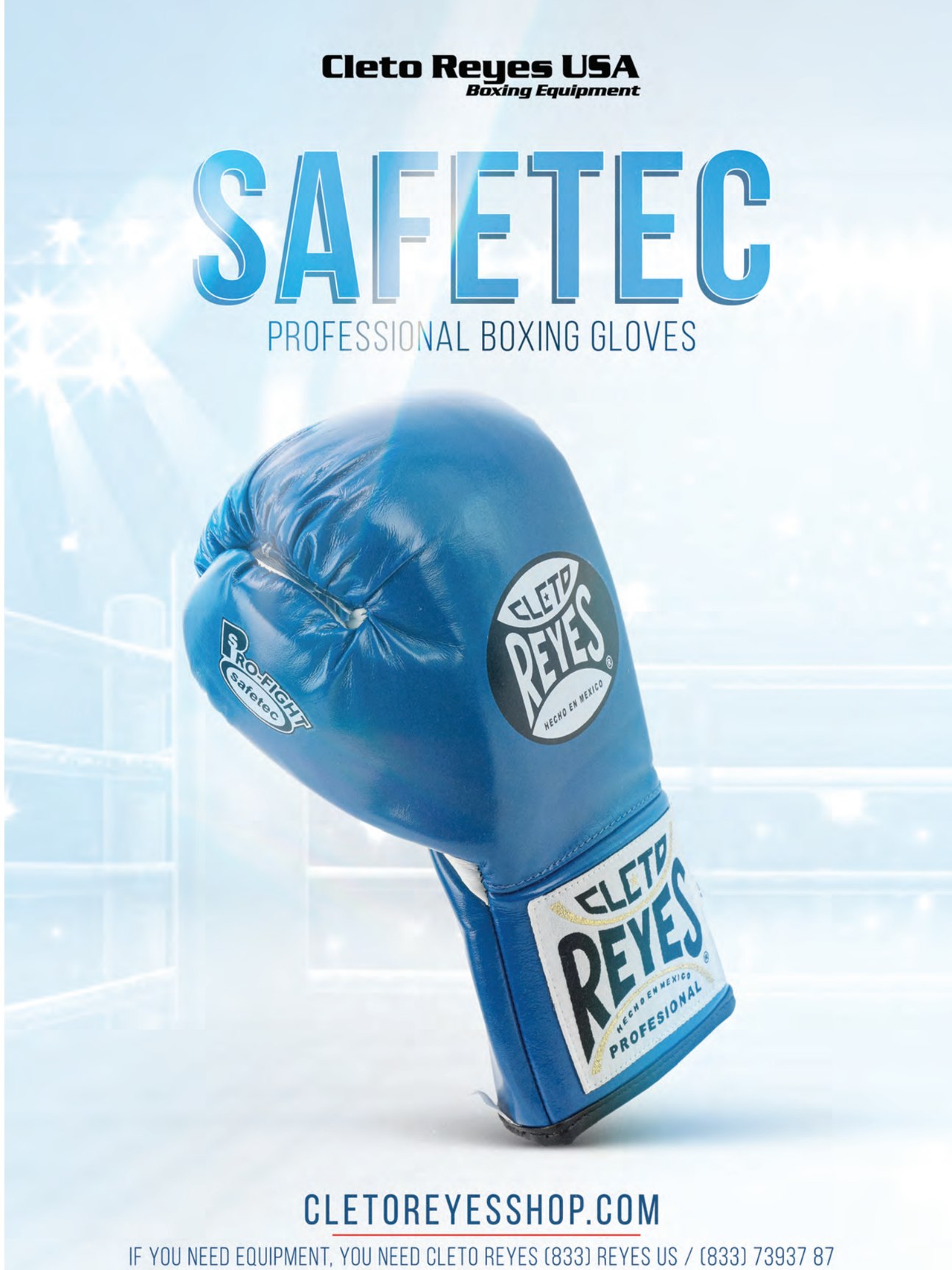
AUG. 5 – Amanda Serrano vs. Heather Hardy, featherweights (for Serrano's undisputed championship), Dallas (DAZN PPV). Also, Jake Paul vs. Nate Diaz, cruiserweights.

AUG. 5 – Erislandy Lara vs. Danny Garcia, middleweights (for Lara's WBA title), Brooklyn, N.Y. (Showtime).

AUG. 12 – Emanuel Navarrete vs. Oscar Valdez, junior lightweights (for Navarrete's WBO title), Glendale, Ariz. (ESPN/ESPN+).

AUG. 19 – Artur Beterbiev vs. Callum Smith, light heavyweights, Quebec City, Canada (ESPN).

RYAN HAFEY

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